

No Charge Frank, has in lock,

No, 1, Complete.]

[Price 25 Cents.]

DE WITT'S
NIGHTSHADE SERIE

N. ORR. N. Y.

NIGHTSHAD



OR,

CLAUDE DUVAL, THE DASHING HIGHWAYMAN.

NIGHTSHADE;

OR,

CLAUDE DUVAL,

THE DASHING HIGHWAYMAN.

GIVING A FULL ACCOUNT OF

DUVAL'S EXPLOITS ON THE ROAD, AND HIS ADVENTURES AT
THE MASKED BALL WITH A BEAUTIFUL
DUCHESS.

New York:

ROBERT M. DE WITT, PUBLISHER,

No. 33 ROSE STREET,

(Between Duane and Frankfort Streets.)

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1865,

BY ROBERT M. DE WITT,

In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the Southern
District of New York.


THE NIGHTSHADE SERIES.

- No. 1. NIGHTSHADE ; or, CLAUDE DUVAL, THE DASHING HIGHWAYMAN. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 2. NIGHTSHADE ON THE HEATH ; or, CLAUDE AND THE KING. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 3. CLAUDE AND THE COUNTESS ; or, NIGHTSHADE NEAR NEW-GATE. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 4. HOUNSLOW JACK ; or. DUVAL AND THE DARK LANTERN. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 5. CLAUDE IN THE CATHEDRAL ; or, A NIGHT IN THE VAULTS. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 6. THE GIRL OF THE GIBBET ; or, CLAUDE SAVES THE CAPTIVE. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 7. THE HIGHWAYMAN'S DOOM ; or, THE ROAD AND ITS RIDERS. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 8. THE FATAL TREE ; or, THE GIBBET BEARS FRUIT. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
- No. 9. THE LAST LEAP ; or, THE REWARD OF CRIME. 8vo, Paper. 25 cents.
-

THE NIGHTSHADE SERIES of Romances, based upon the adventures of the world-renowned Claude Duval, whose reputation, although he was branded as a criminal, stands unsullied as a man of personal charity, are among most interesting of fictions replete with thrilling incidents. The various phases of society through which this wonderful, although guilty, man passed on his road from innocent life to the gallows, are distinctly marked, so that the entire course of his crime is depicted in startling and instructive characters. The fascinations of an unlawful career, the adversities of a wasted existence and culminating termination of

a perverted philanthropy are set forth in these pages with a power and vigor, bringing imagination into reality. The great Book of Life contains fewer pages more worthy of perusal, as each impresses the reader with a fresher and more novel appreciation of his own dignity. "The proper study of mankind is man," says the great poet of humanity, and where can we find better food for contemplation and reflection than is furnished in the diversified career of chivalric, yet erring, members of our own race? From this point of view, criminal life is as attractive as it is instructively useful.

PUBLISHED BY ROBERT M. DE WITT, No. 33 ROSE ST., NEW YORK.

 Sent by mail, post-paid, upon receipt of price, to any part of the United States or Canada.

NIGHTSHADE;

OR,

CLAUDE DUVAL, THE DASHING HIGHWAYMAN.

CHAPTER I.

CLAUDE DUVAL RESCUES A PRISONER AND GAINS A WIFE.

"SAVE me! save me! Will no one save me? I am innocent of this crime which is laid to my charge. It is hard to die for that which never in thought, word, or deed can cling to me in the shape of guilt. Save me, oh, save me!"

With a wild rapidity of utterance that would not be stayed.

With a shrieking vehemence which no human power could conquer.

Wringing her hands and dashing back from her pale, blanched face the luxuriant hair, that seemed, in that moment of pain and degradation, to form a veil for the lovely face it belonged to, stood a young girl.

Scarcely past the age of childhood.

A young English maiden.

Such an one as is loved and cherished and made much of.

The idol of a house.

The cherished jewel of every heart.

A creature to speak gently to—a sunshine—an angelic presence, such as might wean the soul from all degrading thoughts and aspirations.

A fair young English girl.

She stood upon a scaffold.

She was brought out to die.

To die a death at once of horror and degradation—to be held up as a spectacle to the twice three thousand eyes bent upon her, beneath the fleecy clouds and scattered blue of a fair April sky.

To die by the hands of the common executioner, with a name which should be given over to execration when the light in those sweet eyes should be quenched forever in the gloom of the grave.

"Save me! save me! I cannot, must not die! My trial was a mockery—delusion! I am not guilty! Help, help, I cry to all! to earth—to heaven! Mercy, mercy! Is there no justice among men, or pity in heaven? I am not guilty! I am not guilty!"

"Stop her mouth!" growled a ruffianly voice; "stop her mouth, I say! This must not be, Mr. Sheriff."

"She was given leave to speak."

"Yes. To make a last speech and confession—but this is a defiance. Stop her mouth!"

"I dare not, Mr. Mossy Pendell; I dare not! Look at the people! Did you ever see such faces in your life? Look at their eyes! I told you how it would be! There now! there now!"

A roaring cry came from a thousand throats.

That was the cry that had been evoked from all those hearts by the shrieking appeal of the young girl.

That young girl brought out to die!

Oh! what a mockery was the April sunshine, as it mingled its golden hues with her fair hair.

The scene was old Bloomsbury Fields. The bright green spring grass spread a delicate carpet for miles around. The trees and hedges were bursting with new vegetation, and many a forest bird—the like of which has long since retired from the busy haunts of the great city, which has gathered within its long arms all those once fair fields to its great wilderness of bricks and mortar—hid themselves deep in bush and brake.

The second George was on the throne of these realms, and human life was of but little account.

“Help!” shrieked the girl again, as she saw the sympathetic movement of that myriad of upturned faces around her. “Help! save me! Not because I am brought out here to die, but because I am innocent! You have children of your own, many of you! I see young faces among you, and I call upon them for aid! Save me! for the love of all that is merciful and just, save me from this terrible death! I am not guilty—not guilty—not guilty!”

The voice of the young creature became hoarse and appalling.

There was a spot of blood upon her lips.

The human agony of the fair face seemed to strike upon every heart there present as with a tangible blow.

Strong stalwart men fainted.

Mothers—for there were even such as spectators of that terrible scene—clasped their children to their breasts and shrieked aloud.

The Sheriff, whose duty it was to superintend that execution, turned white as his own cravat and ruffles, and trembled palpably.

He stood by his carriage steps, and by his side was a man, tall beyond all ordinary tallness, with a face of such cadaverous malignity, that no one could look upon him without a shudder.

That was Mossy Pendell.

“By heaven and the other place!” he shouted, “we shall have a rescue! Look to your men, Mr. Muckles; you are the chief officer on the ground. Look to your men, and close round the scaffold. The people are already half mad with pity, and soon they will be wholly so with rage.”

“Look to yourself, sir!” replied the officer savagely. “Look to yourself, sir; for if the people’s rage should come, I would not be in Mr. Mossy Pendell’s shoes for the best estate in all England.”

A terrible shout came from the crowd.

Crawling up upon the scaffold through an orifice in its centre, came something that looked scarcely human.

A shock of red hair.

A distorted countenance, boasting of but one eye.

A twisted trunk and legs that did not seem to belong to it.

The yell of execration came again, and the hangman—yes, that was the hangman—bent and cowered before the storm.

“Now, my dear, really——”

That was the way he addressed the young girl.

He placed one of his ugly, paw-like hands upon her neck.

She cast him from her with a shudder, and he fell grovelling at her feet.

“Too late! too late!” she shrieked. “Are you to feel for me, and is it to be too late to save me? What sympathy is this, that lets the victim perish? I call upon you to save me, and you answer me with shrieks and cries!”

Help! Help! I say again! Not that I am young and that it is hard to die, but because I am innocent of the crime of which they have declared me guilty! Save me! save me! I tell you all that this is murder, and you are all murderers that can look on and see me perish without raising a hand to rescue me!"

These appeals exercised a powerful influence upon the assembled crowd.

The vast concourse swayed to and fro in an agitated fashion ; and closer closer still around the scaffold pressed the multitude.

't was in vain that the ordinary force of police-officers strove to keep the people from passing up to the very posts that supported the platform of death.

In a few seconds more those very officers themselves formed but units of the crowd, and were utterly helpless.

In fact, they found that their own safety was concerned in affecting an obscurity very foreign to their natures.

Then the few authorities that were mounted, saw that affairs were getting serious.

One man in a semi-military uniform, made a motion with his hand; and in as compact a body as they could preserve, a party of what was then called the King's Light Horse began to press up from a distance towards the scaffold.

Simultaneous with that military movement ensued another.

A company of the Foot Guard, who had rested on their arms in a hollow of the ground not far from the back of old Montague House, formed in regular compact order, and slowly began to drive stragglers before them as they too approached the scaffold.

The terrified Sheriff retreated into his carriage.

Some clouds stretched themselves over the face of the fair blue sky.

A sudden chill came through the atmosphere, and one of those remarkable changes which are the characteristics of an April day in England appeared about to ensue.

A few large, heavy drops of rain fell upon the upturned faces of the crowd

It was a moment of perplexity.

A moment of indecision to the people.

A moment of despair to that young, fair creature, who was brought out to die in all her innocence and all her beauty on that morning of April smiles and tears.

The spectacle presented by the whole assemblage—by the terrible apparatus of death—and by the movement made by the civil and military authorities, was now strange and interesting in the extreme.

Up to that moment the people had the case in their own hands.

It only required an active movement of one or two adventurous spirits, and the innocent victim would be torn from the hands of the law.

If, however, the company of the Foot Guard, and the small party of the King's Light Horse, should succeed in hemming in the scaffold, all hope of rescue would be at an end.

The crowd saw this.

The girl on the scaffold saw it.

She made a last appeal.

"Help—help, again! Save me—save me! Help, ere it be too late! Take me among you and save me! You cannot have come here to see me die!"

A suggestive swinging movement among the crowd, which wafted as if in waves towards the foot of the scaffold some of the foremost of the throng, was the response to this appeal.

And the foremost of all was a tall man, having the appearance of a grazier or a well-to-do farmer.

He wore a broad-brimmed slouched hat, and a white frieze coat of ample dimensions.

This man, either from accident or design, kept himself in front of the crowd, and soon reached the very foot of the scaffold.

A strange movement now took place immediately in this man's vicinity ; and it appeared as if some eight or ten persons were violently intent upon congregating themselves around him ; although, to look at them, no one could suppose for a single moment that any community of feeling or interest could be among them.

One was attired as a sailor.

Another wore the rags of a beggar in the last stage of destitution.

A third had the unmistakable costume of a butcher.

Others of these men were in the ordinary costume of the half-shabby race of civilians who hover between want and a sufficiency, probably, for the next four-and-twenty hours.

The pertinacity with which these men fought their way onward was very great.

And yet it was done with a good-humoured exercise of strength and movement of the shoulders which would scarcely be resented.

Bit by bit, too, inch by inch, almost, a large wagon, drawn by four huge Flemish horses, had been making its way on the outskirts of the crowd in a most singular fashion.

Commencing its route where there were but few people to interrupt it, this wagon was drawn round the place of execution in a circle.

But it was a circle which narrowed each moment perceptibly, until at last the huge horses, and the great lumbering vehicle, with its enormous canvass covering, had insinuated themselves into the very midst of the throng.

So dexterously had this been done, that people found themselves entangled with the wagon and its horses before they could form the slightest suspicion of its presence.

It seemed to many as if this great vehicle had suddenly dropped from the clouds, so quietly did they find themselves hemmed in and jammed against each other by its ponderous wheels and sides.

And so the wagon neared the scaffold.

The King's Light Horse began to be impatient.

They were a small party of only twelve men and a sergeant.

The latter was a choleric man, and imprudently he used the flat of his sabre upon the heads of several of the crowd to force himself a passage.

For an instant a conflict ensued between the people and the troopers, which the latter had the good sense to prevent from being sanguinary, by allowing themselves to be effectually impeded by the people.

The impetuous sergeant was dismounted by the summary process of being dislodged from his saddle by a jerk of one of his legs, which no horseman could resist.

The company of foot soldiers halted on a little eminence.

And then the girl shrieked again for help, as she gazed about her and saw all those little changes rapidly affected like the mysterious changes of a kaleidoscope.

What did they portend to her ?

A chance of life, or a greater certainty of death.

The executioner evidently thought the latter.

He crawled along the planking of the scaffold like some loathsome reptile.

He caught at the skirt of the dress of the young girl.

He spoke again in that same croaking voice which had before made her shudder.

"Now, my dear, time's up! What's the use of making a bother about what must be?"

"No, no!" she shrieked. "Time is passed! I will not die! I cannot; or if I must, let me meet death in any shape but this! Help—help—help!"

The tall man in the white frieze coat scrambled up on to the scaffold.

A roaring shout arose from the crowd, for they seemed to think that now something was about to be done which would gratify the interest they felt in the young criminal.

It was a weight off every heart to see that somebody was at all events commencing a course of action of a more practically defiant character to the authorities than mere yells and outcries.

The first movement of this tall and stalwart man was a highly popular one.

With one hearty kick he sent the executioner rolling from the scaffold among the crowd.

The fate of the hedious wretch seemed to be certain.

He was tossed from hand to hand like a human foot-ball.

Then some of these strangely assorted men who had gathered round the tall stranger in the slouched hat and the frieze coat laid hands on the half fainting wretch, and tossed him back again on to the boards of the scaffold.

He rolled along until he reached that opening in its floor from which he had emerged, and then, dropping through it, disappeared into comparative obscurity and safety.

The tall man standing upon the scaffold glanced about him like some general on an eminence marshalling his forces.

And then, notwithstanding the frieze coat, the slouched hat, the coarse leather leggings he wore, and the hob-nailed boots, every one there present felt that he was not what he appeared, but that he had come forth to play some strange part in the exciting drama of that day.

"Friends all," he cried, "do you wish this young girl to die?"

"No!" was shouted from every throat.

A bright smile was on the lips of the stranger.

Then that fair young creature on the scaffold understood, in the midst of her bewilderment of head and brain, that let his power to aid her be what it might, he came as a friend.

With a shriek of joy she sank to his feet.

She clung frantically to the skirts of that coarse frieze coat.

"Save me—save me! Heaven will bless you for the act! Save me—save me! I am innocent! Indeed I am innocent!"

"Hush!" whispered the stranger.

"Oh, no—no! Let me yet speak to you! Perhaps you are not quite sure that I am innocent; but I call heaven to witness—to witness by some visible sign—if it be but a gleam of sunshine, to my perfect innocence!"

A cloud swept aside, and right on to the scaffold, gilding into beauty even the rough garments of that grazier looking man, came a broad beam of golden sunlight.

"You are answered," he said; "although the token was not needed."

"And you will save me?"

"When you were a little child, perchance amid the storm of winter you slept in peace, happiness, and security in some pretty cot, over which hovered a mother's love?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"You are as safe here, then, as you were in that happy time when no harm could reach you, while so fenced in by boundless affection. Hush!—do not cling to me, but let me act!"

The girl released him from her frantic hold.

She still knelt upon the rough planks of the scaffold.

Her overcharged heart found relief in a gush of tears.

She felt assured that that man would save her, although how he was to accomplish the feat was past comprehension.

CHAPTER II.

CLAUDE DUVAL CALLS FOR HIS BOOTS, HIS HAT, AND HIS HORSE.

"ARREST that man! What does he do upon the scaffold? Arrest him! Ten guineas from my own pocket to the officer who makes him a prisoner!"

Mossy Pendell spoke in tones of rage.

"Arrest him yourself, Mr. Pendell," growled Muckles, the chief officer. "Don't you see the Light Horse have come to a standstill, and how are we to persuade the people to give us free passage?"

"Is the girl to escape, then?"

Muckles shrugged his shoulders.

"I can do nothing," he said, "until reinforcements arrive. I have sent a messenger to the King's Mews, and we shall soon have plenty of help."

Pendell burst into a ferocious laugh.

"Bravo, Muckles! you're the man after all, and it will be a sad pity if the murderess of General Everton escape justice. What is that waggon doing yonder?"

Muckles shook his head.

"It's a mystery to me, Mr. Pendell, but I have watched it for these ten minutes, and it has been getting into the crowd by going round in a circle, or rather in a kind of cork-screw fashion. Another turn and it will be at the foot of the scaffold."

"Muckles, the girl must hang, or there is no justice in England."

"I've nothing to do with justice," replied Muckles, dryly. "It's my duty, as the Sheriff's chief officer on this occasion, to see that the execution takes place, and I mean to do so."

"But the people?"

"Bah! let them bawl themselves hoarse till the troops come from the King's Mews, and then we shall see another complexion put on the affair."

"And that waggon?"

"It is driven by some fool who is probably too bewildered to know where he is going."

"Behold! still that man upon the scaffold."

"I see him."

"Who and what is he?"

"I know not—and it matters not, except that he is doing you good service, Mr. Mossy Pendell."

"Me service?"

"Certainly, you want Lucy Everton hanged, and he is kindly putting off the time till the troops arrive from the King's Mews, by talking some mountebank rubbish to the crowd."

"Ah! look! look! I don't know that."

Mossy Pendell clutched the officer's arm with the energy of a vice.

The tall man on the scaffold had not been idle during this time.

Again he spoke to the people.

"Convinced of the innocence of this young girl—although she has been duly convicted of the murder of her uncle, General Everton—we all want to save her."

"All! all!"

"There was but one man in all England who it seemed to her had the courage to attempt her rescue, and she sent to him a ring."

"Yes! yes!" shrieked Lucy Everton. "There was one man who saved me a year since from a great danger, and on that occasion he gave me a ring which I was to send to him if ever I required his aid. I did send it. The ring was to be placed in the crevice of an old oak on Hampstead Heath. There was one who, in the dreary prison-house of Newgate, swore so to place it."

"He did so," said the stranger in the frieze coat.

Lucy uttered a cry of joy.

"Then he will still come to save me; but it is late, oh! it is late, and moments now are hours of agony and danger!"

"Hush! Fear nothing."

The stranger turned to the crowd again.

"Good people all, if you would save this young creature from the shameful death which perjury and false witnesses have prepared for her, you will let my waggon get a little nearer, for you see I am careful of Flanders horses."

"Bring it along! bring it along! Make way! make way there! It's his waggon: he's a grazier from the marshes in Essex. He'll take the girl home in the waggon, and make a farmer's wife of her. Hurrah! hurrah! Bring it along!"

"And gentlemen all," added the stranger, "you will be so good as to keep those few sensible dragoons of his Majesty's Light Horse at a respectful distance."

There scarcely needed this intimation to the crowd, for the dozen mounted men were so completely separated and hemmed in, that for their own lives' sakes, they were compelled to be passive spectators of whatever might happen.

"As regards the company of foot yonder," continued the mysterious stranger, "I may tell you, all in confidence, that they are merely waiting for reinforcements from the King's Mews."

A tremendous yell of anger arose from the crowd.

"But as we don't intend to wait, and as I come here with the full intention of rescuing this young girl, and taking her with me, perhaps—as I feel myself among friends—it would look like a want of confidence not to let you know who I am."

There was a tone of high-bred courtly banter about the manner in which the seeming grazier spoke, that was exceedingly fascinating to the crowd.

He was cheered vociferously, and as each moment the waggon approached nearer and nearer to the scaffold, it was evident by the quick, keen movement of his head and eyes, that not the minutest change of circumstances escaped his observation.

From afar off came the light tap of a drum.

"That's kind," he said. "The reinforcements from the King's Mews have started, and we have no time to lose."

Every eye of that vast assemblage was fixed upon this mysterious man, as now he slowly stepped to the front of the scaffold, and took off the slouched hat which hitherto had concealed the whole upper part of his face.

A profusion of glossy black hair, in natural wavy masses, descended nearly to his shoulders, and as he shook it back from a brow which was certainly one of the finest, the smile that sat upon his lips was irresistibly engaging.

Lucy Everton uttered a shriek of joy.

"It is he! It is he! I know him now! It is he, and I am saved!"

"Hush again! Poor suffering one," said the stranger, in low tones, "do not impede me, for we have yet much to do."

The tears that Lucy Everton shed now were those of joy and happiness.

What faith she must have had in that one man, to suppose that he could save her from all the power and all the myrmidons of the law!

The distant tap of the drum, now a little more distinctly, announced the route of the reinforcements from the King's Mews.

"We have ten minutes yet," said the mysterious stranger.

As he spoke, he unbuttoned the frieze coat from its close contact with his neck, and dashing it aside, he rapidly stripped it off and flung it from the scaffold, when it was caught by one of those men who had so closely surrounded him.

The metamorphosis in the stranger's appearance was something truly astonishing.

In the frieze coat he had looked a big, burly, and somewhat shabby man about the middle age; and although this latter supposition had been dissipated by the removal of the slouched hat, that effect was nothing in comparison with what now startled the senses of the immense throng of persons whose eyes were now all fixed upon him.

The stranger now appeared as a tall slender young man, attired in such startling contradiction to his first appearance, that he is worth a brief description.

A coat of rich crimson maroon velvet, loaded with gold lace.

A cravat of the most superb texture.

Ruffles of great value.

A vest of pearl-coloured satin—the buttons of which sparkled with precious stones.

A long, straight court-sword, the hilt of which was either of gold, or richly gilt.

This was the kind of courtly rich apparition who emerged from beneath the frieze coat, and which bore as much resemblance to the rough-looking grazier he had first been taken for, as the most gorgeous sparkling butterfly does to the grub from which it owes its origin.

A shout of applause and a general clapping of hands arose from the delighted throng about the scaffold.

The elegantly attired stranger now slightly stooped, and removed the coarse leather leggings; at the same time that he knocked from his feet his heavy hobnailed shoes that had formed so characteristic a portion of his previous costume.

"Blossom!" he shouted.

"Yes, Captain!" responded a voice; and to the surprise of the crowd, a man in the costume of a very smart groom looked out from the tail of the waggon, which by this time was not twenty feet from the scaffold.

"My boots, Blossom."

"Yes, Captain."

From hand to hand a pair of tall horsemen's boots reached the stranger, who, with all the deliberation and ease of a man in his own dressing-room, drew them on.

The mob raised another wild clamour of applause.

The costume was perfect.

The tall bright boots—the whole dress, so complete in its details, and so rich in its fabric—made this mysterious stranger look quite a picture of courtly grace and manly beauty.

"Blossom!" he cried again, when the shouts and clapping of hands had subsided—"my hat!"

An elegant hat of black felt, looped by a diamond, was handed up to the scaffold.

"Ah!" cried the stranger, as he gracefully placed it on his head; "our friends from the King's Mews are near at hand, and it is time for us to go."

"Mr. Sheriff," roared the man who was named Mossy Pendell—"Mr. Sheriff, I call upon you to do your duty. Do you not see that there is something going on which will defeat justice? John Muckles, I call upon you too."

"Peace, Mr. Pendell," replied the officer of police. "What is the use of you calling? We can do nothing. All those drums and fifes, which are now each moment becoming plainer, ring through Bloomsbury Fields."

"Then I myself will adventure," cried Pendell, in a voice of passion. "Twenty guineas each to every man who follows me!"

Several of the mounted police officers, allured by the bribe, put their horses in motion to follow Mossy Pendell, who, before he started, thumped heavily upon the roof of the Sheriff's coach with the heavy loaded handle of his riding whip.

"Mr. Sheriff! Mr. Sheriff! we are going to try to vindicate the law, and it is your duty to accompany us."

"It may be my duty," said the Sheriff, looking from the coach window, while anger and fear struggled for mastery in his countenance,— "it may be my duty, but it is not my pleasure, and I shall wait for the reinforcements from the King's Mews."

One straggling horseman of the dragoons had managed to get himself clear of the crowd, and with his accoutrements disordered, and his horse looking scared and frightened, he made his way towards the carriage of the Sheriff, and the little throng of mounted constables.

"Hilloa, you, sir!" shouted Mossy Pendell. "If you are a good shot with your carbine, you may do better service yet than all your comrades, by bringing down that man on the scaffold."

"Yes," said the soldier, sulkily, "and get pulled limb from limb for my pains. The people are half mad, and what care I if the girl hangs or not?"

"Lend it me, then."

The trooper laughed as he flung himself from his horse, and commenced re-arranging some of the innumerable straps and buckles of his uniform.

"Take it, and welcome; but don't draw me into a mess."

"Is it loaded?"

"You may swear to that."

Mossy Pendell stooped to the saddle of the dragoon and unhooked the carbine.

He then by a rapid movement of his horse placed himself exactly behind the Sheriff's carriage.

He was then just of a height to make use of the edge of that roof as a resting-place for the carbine.

"Hold! hold, Mr. Pendell!" cried the Sheriff; "don't fire! We shall all be sacrificed to your indiscretion, whether you hit or miss."

"I will try fortune."

Affairs on and about the scaffold had not stood still while Mossy Pendell was thus taking measures for the destruction of the mysterious and courtly personage who had come to the rescue of Lucy Everton.

Standing calmly near the extreme verge of the rough, uneven platform from which so much youth and beauty were to be dashed into eternity, the distinguished looking gentleman in the crimson maroon coat ran his eyes over the vast multitude, smiling lightly and gaily as if nothing were amiss.

He gave a slight inclination of his head in the direction of the advanced fifes and drums from the King's Mews.

"Good friends all," he said, "the air of Bloomsbury Fields will not for many minutes longer agree with my constitution."

A torrent of advice, in every possible tone that the human voice was capable of assuming, burst from all parts of the crowd.

"Off with you! Off while you may! Take the girl off, and we'll make a lane for you! Don't stay to be picked up by the guard! Off with you; there are choice hiding places in old Clerkenwell! Make way for him! Make way for him! He's some great lord, after all, who loves a pretty face! We'll make way for your honour, and good luck to you!"

The courtly personage waved his arm for silence.

"My very excellent friends, on an occasion like this I prefer horse exercise. Ah! there is less time so spare than I expected."

A rattling roll from the brass drums of the approaching infantry smote upon the ears of the crowd.

The elegant unknown on the scaffold turned abruptly towards the Sheriff's carriage.

"Fire, Mr. Mossy Pendell," he cried, "or you may be too late."

The movements of this great enemy to Lucy Everton had not for a single instant escaped the eagle glance of her handsome champion.

Mossy Pendell, upon hearing himself thus addressed, uttered a cry of alarm, and it was probably more an involuntary act than one intended at the moment, by which he pulled the trigger of the carbine.

A puff of white smoke.

A loud report.

A whistling bullet, that embedded itself deeply in one of the upright posts of the scaffold, were the results of this attempt to demolish the man who had become a popular idol in the space of ten minutes.

A roar of execration burst from the crowd, which in one mighty surge moved in the direction of Pendell, the Sheriff, and the group of half-terrified police officers who had been for some time enforced spectators of the strange rescue that was taking place.

The horses in the Sheriff's carriage likewise unaccustomed to such alarming noises, apparently from the carriage behind them, became restive, and plunged and reared in an alarming fashion.

Then Lucy Everton's protector spoke aloud, and his voice rang like a clarion from one end of the vast space to the other.

"One moment, good friends," he cried. "That man will keep, for do you not see that he has been wrenched from his horse, and clings in desperation to the back of the carriage? It is now necessary that we should part, and it is more necessary still that this young girl and I should not be pursued instantly. We are about to take our way to Hampstead Heath. Ah, a strong party, by my faith!"

Scattering the outskirts of the crowd before them by a vigorous charge, appeared a couple of companies of the troops who had heralded their approach by the clamour of the brass drums.

"Blossom!" shouted the myterious stranger.

The smart-looking groom re-appeared from beneath the awning of the waggon.

"Yes, Captain."

"My horse, Nightshade!"

CHAPTER III.

CLAUDE DUVAL SURPRISES BOTH FRIENDS AND FOES AND GALLOPS FROM
BLOOMSBURY FIELDS.

THE effect of this cool and apparently impracticable order from the mysterious and gallant-looking personage for his horse, upon the crowd, was immense.

Vociferous cheers greeted what seemed to be a piece of bravado.

The few cool and calculating heads among them might now doubt if this person had in any way the power of saving the young girl from the terrible death that seemed to await her, but to the vast majority the cool assurance of the gentleman in the velvet coat was perfectly enchanting.

"My horse, Nightshade!"

"Yes, Captain."

Another ringing cheer burst from the crowd.

"By your leave, gentlemen," added the mysterious stranger; and taking from his pocket as he spoke a pair of elegantly chased silver spurs, he, with great grace of movement slipped them into the sockets in the heel of his boot.

"My horse, Nightshade! Quick, Blossom, quick!"

The crowd was awed into silence.

There was no levity about this man.

Not the ghost of a smile sat upon his finely chiselled lips as he in this manner called for a horse, which it would seem must either descend from the clouds or come up to him from the earth.

But the mystery was soon solved.

A large portion of the awning of the huge waggon was flung aside by the smart and agile groom.

The gentleman in the velvet coat caught Lucy Everton in his arms, swinging her lightly and gracefully on one side out of the reach of a possible danger.

Then from the waggon there leaped, like some glossy black apparition, a horse of singular beauty.

Leaped right on to the very scaffold.

Leaped through the intervening space, as if by some strange effort of volition, that carried the creature exactly wherever it wished to go, as though it had possessed wings.

Lightly the horse made good its footing upon the loose woodwork in a crouching attitude, and then drawing itself up until its long slender limbs were straight as mountain saplings, the creature rested its head upon the shoulder of its master with a mute caress.

Then the hearts of all present were taken by storm.

Cheers, shouts, cries and sobs burst from the multitude, and if that noble-looking steed and its courtly master had been something really more than human, they could not have more moved the great soul of the multitude about them.

The mysterious stranger flung his arm over the arched neck of his gallant steed.

"Ho, Nightshade!" he said. "My brave Nightshade, we shall have a short gallop, but a sharp one!"

He sprung to the horse's back.

Then Lucy Everton, with a cry that had some alarm mingled in it, wound her fair arms about the mane of the horse.

"Me too!" she cried. "Take me too! You will not desert me now?"

"Now, nor ever!" was the reply.

The tap of the drums ceased.

A man on foot had reached the advancing troops, and with furious gesticulations he had addressed the officer in command.

"Make ready! Present!" cried the officer in ringing accents.

"Ah!" said the gallant stranger; "it seems these people are in earnest."

A shriek of dismay proclaimed that the crowd saw what was about to happen.

"A hail-storm! A hail-storm!" cried the mysterious stranger. "Down, Nightshade, down!"

The horse doubled its long slender legs beneath him, and rolled lightly to his side.

The rider lay like some bright saddle-cloth over the black, glossy hide of the sagacious and obedient creature, and with one arm around the slender waist of Lucy Everton, he brought her down with him to the floor of the scaffold.

"Fire!"

The rattling discharge of musketry that followed must have been fatal to everything in life that had projected three feet above the scaffold floor; but neither the gallant stranger in the velvet coat, nor Lucy Everton, nor that coal-black steed, who had obeyed voice and hand with such exactitude, sustained the slightest injury.

"Dear Lucy," he whispered, "one word while death thus hurtles over us. Will you be mine?"

"Yours?"

"Yes, my wife! Not the partner of my heart, but its sole possessor. Here, in this moment of peril, I put to you the question commonly breathed amid sylvan scenes of beauty, or in the quietude of some happy home. Will you be mine?"

Lucy looked into the bright eyes that were fixed upon her.

There was a flush in her face and a flutter at her heart.

The willing words flew to her lips.

"I will!"

"Then, dear girl, you shall know who and what I am before you confirm this consent by another word. And now we must be off. Up, Nightshade, up! Off and away! Emulate the storm-clouds as they career before the face of heaven! Let the loud south wind chase you in vain! Up and away, Nightshade! Up and away!"

The horse was on its feet in an instant.

Its mysterious rider rose with it.

"Spring, Lucy, spring!" he cried.

With his left arm he gave the young girl but slight assistance as she sprung behind him on the horse.

"Cling to me! cling to me! I may have much to do. Leap, Nightshade, leap!"

The horse crouched for a spring.

The mob parted right and left, like some ocean wave cleft by the keel of some mighty ship.

The black horse, with its double burden, leaped from the scaffold.

The hurrah that burst from every lip echoed far and near over that waste of fields now so densely populated.

For about three times its own length only was there space for the horse to proceed, but that short open route ever presented itself, as with a swinging half-gallop the creature sped its way.

The outskirts of the crowd were gained in two minutes.

There was a grassy knoll, near the topmost portion of which grew two small Oriental-looking cedars.

At three bounds the black horse reached the top of the knoll.

Then the mysterious stranger faced his steed to the people, and with a flush of excitement and joy upon his countenance, he raised his hat some half a foot from his head.

"Gentlemen all," he said, "we will not part company without an introduction. Your names, perhaps, being so numerous, would be tedious to mention, so I will take you all for Englishmen, who love justice and a pretty girl."

"Yes—yes!" shouted a thousand voices. "And a brave and gallant gentleman, too! Good fortune to you and yours!"

"That's kind; but as I am only one person, I can give myself a name, if you wish to hear it."

"Name—name! Who are you? Name—name!"

A smile lit up the stranger's face.

With the rim of his hat he dashed further back the heavy masses of his dark hair.

"*I am called Claude Duval!*"

Another of those roaring shouts burst from the crowd, which indicated extreme satisfaction.

They had all heard of Claude Duval.

The dashing and daring highwayman.

The finished gentleman.

The slayer of a thousand hearts.

The romantic hero of adventures almost past the bounds of credibility, and yet to the truth of which the highest in the land were willing to testify.

The great Claude Duval! Only believed in by many as a myth, because his depredations upon road and heath were confined to the great and the rich, neither of which classes of the social commonwealth were likely to be largely represented in such a throng.

Bowing gracefully upon his horse, until his own raven hair mingled with the mane of his gallant steed, the great highwayman spoke again:—

"Yes! I am Claude Duval; and already I can see that my name is at once an anger and a terror."

He pointed with his hat towards the disordered throng of police officers who were shrinking back irresolutely from the path he had taken.

Duval laughed.

"Off again, Nightshade! And yet one moment, good friends all: this is my horse, named Nightshade from his coat and mane, black as a thunder-cloud and sleek as satin. I have made a friend and companion of the creature, and so awakened all its rarer and nobler instincts. It is of Arab breed, full of chest, thin of flank, a small head, and slender neck; the creature loves me, and but that this day I have acquired the love of another dearer than a wilderness of Nightshades, this four-footed friend of mine was nearly all the world to me. Farewell to all! and it may be that you again will hear of Claude Duval."

The horse shrunk down, as though seized with some sudden pang.

It was but a habit of the creature preparatory to the rush it was about to make forward in obedience to an impulse of its master.

The rush was made.

In two minutes more Claude Duval and his horse, with Lucy Everton clinging to him, and her long loosened tresses streaming in the wind, were out of sight amid the trees that skirted Bloomsbury Fields to the north.

* * * * *

There is a gloomy, painted chamber in Camden House, Kensington—that house of many memories and associations, which has so recently succumbed to the great destroyer, fire!—that house which has witnessed the revelries of the second Charles.

That house, which, passing through many mutations, became an interesting study, even to the present generation, before it lay, as it now lies, a heap of shapeless ruins.

In that dim, painted chamber, on what has been a state bed, lies a man.

He is past the prime of life.

His white hair streams upon the pillow.

His face is pale with grief, with care, and with ill health.

The apartment has been at one time luxuriantly furnished.

But everything was fading to decay, and the bright colours which at one time had made the tapestries and the painted ceiling gay and beautiful, had all sobered down to one dead, dingy level.

By a great effort, the elderly man who was lying on one arm looked about him.

He spoke feebly.

"What is this? What is the meaning of all this? What mysterious slumber is this which seems for ever to sit upon my senses. I awaken for a brief half-hour, and crave for food. I eat, I drink, and then with difficulty I totter again to this bed, and the mysterious sleep comes over me. Why do I lead this life? What is the meaning of it? Where is Lucy? Where is my dear niece Lucy, the idol of my heart? Come to me now, child of my adoption. Come to me, and be happy in the consciousness of your dear uncle's love. I have chased your cousin Mossy Pendell from the house, and he can no longer insult you, or impose upon my goodness. You shall not be compelled to wed his dissolute companion, Lord Horlop. Lucy—Lucy, come to me—come to me!"

It was evident that this elderly man, whose tones words, and manner bespoke him a gentleman, was making great efforts to resist the overpowering desire to sleep again.

Thrice he let his head droop upon the pillow, and closed his eyes, but as often as he did so a confused murmuring sound in the lower part of the house partially aroused him.

He looked up.

He made an effort to leave the state bed.

Folding around him an old faded dressing-gown which had once been of the costliest brocade, he tottered across the floor of the room, holding to various articles of furniture as he went, to sustain his trembling limbs.

The room was of a strange shape.

It was long but very narrow.

Perhaps from end to end it might be thirty feet, but its utmost width did not exceed eight.

It was crescent-shaped, and indeed presented so eccentric an appearance that it could only be accounted for by being what it really was, a secret apartment, constructed round the curved end of one of the principal chambers of the house, and only having the width between that curved end and the outer wall.

There was a dim stained glass window, which looked out into the gardens of Camden House.

It was towards this that the weak, tottering man proceeded.

With difficulty he raised himself sufficiently to look through the stained glass.

It was a crimson pane through which he gazed, and all the trees, and all the shrubs, the flowers, the gravel pathways, and the sky, appeared of a blood-red tint.

But there were other objects which speedily attracted the attention of this mysterious personage.

Winding along the principal gravel path of the garden, came a funeral cortege of great pretensions.

The plumes of feathers—the numerous attendants, with black staves—the hearse, with all its gloomy trappings and paraphernalia, drawn by its six sleek black horses—the carriages that brought up the rear of the procession, and the busy, bustling crowd of officials that always haunt an obsequies of such consequence—made up what, to the eyes of this invalid, was a bewildering pageant.

It was not the less bewildering that he saw it through that ruddy glass, which cast over the whole that strange red tint.

Slowly the whole procession wound its way past one of the wings of the house, and faded from before his eyes, as though it had been the vision of a dream.

There was one carriage, however, that immediately followed the hearse which attracted all the gazer's attention.

It was a well-appointed chariot, with some arms emblazoned on the panel.

"What is this?" cried the man with the white hair. "What is this? What can it mean? That is my coach—those are my arms upon its panels—my horses draw it! What can it mean? Am I a madman, or am I General Sir George Everton? Stop!—stop! Look up, some one, and tell me who and what I am!"

With all the feeble force that remained to him, this afflicted man strove to break the stained glass window.

His feeble strength was unequal to the task.

The framework was of massive lead, and the panes of glass were but small.

But still he struck upon them so as to produce an audible sound, and as he did so he still cried out feebly, "Help me!—help me! Explain all this to me! What does it mean? And who and what am I!"

A heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder.

The feeble man uttered a cry, and in turning abruptly round, lost his precarious footing and half fell to the floor.

"Well, well," said a voice, "how fares it with you?"

Sir George Everton looked up shudderingly.

"Fiend! wretch!" he murmured; "dare you return to this house, from which you have been expelled with ignominy?"

"Ha, ha!"

"Dare you, I say, return hither—you, Mossy Pendell—you, who I forbid even to cross the threshold of Camden House again?"

"I do not return to it, uncle—I never left it."

"Oh, help me heaven! Where is my strength—where my memory—where my energy? Help! help! Will no one help me to outface this villain? Help! help!"

The feeble man dragged himself across the floor, until by the assistance of a chair he rose again to his feet.

Mossy Pendell—for it was indeed he—stood with his arms folded, looking on with perfect indifference.

"Hark you, uncle!" he said. "I saw you looking through yonder window! Whether it was a red, blue, or a yellow view of outward events that you took, I know not—that will depend upon the particular pane of glass you chose to look through, but you saw a funeral procession."

"I did—I did!"

"Ha, ha! you would like to know, perchance, whose it was?"

"No, no—I ask you nothing, Mossy Pendell, but to rid me of your presence."

"Nevertheless, I will tell you. Look at me. Do you not see this suit of sober black—rich and costly, but still complete in its mourning fitness?"

"What—what then?"

"I wear it for my dear deceased uncle, General Sir George Everton."

"For me? For me?"

"Yes, you are dead, and this day you will be buried with great pomp and circumstance in the family vault of the Evertons beneath old St. Paul's."

The elderly gentleman clasped his brow with both hands, and tottered towards the bed.

But he had not strength to reach it.

He only succeeded so far as to clutch one of the rich tapestry curtains, and then he sunk to the floor, either in a swoon or a deep sleep.

Mossy Pendell stepped at once to a particular part of the panelling in one of the walls. He touched a spring, and a long, narrow opening appeared.

"Come in, Horlop," he cried; "but be sure you close the other panel well behind you."

"It is done," said a voice; and there stepped into this singular crescent-shaped apartment, a tall, rakish-looking young man, extravagantly attired according to the prevailing fashion.

"What now, Mossy? What is to be the next move, you complicated rascal?" he said, as with an indolent air he flung himself into the first chair he came to.

The tall, rakish-looking young man took a jewelled snuff-box from his pocket, and throwing the lid open, smelt at its contents.

"Horlop," said Pendell, "this indifference of yours is affectation. If I am a complicated rascal, what are you?"

"Eh?"

"I say, what are you, my Lord Horlop?"

"'Pon soul, I believe Mossy is in a passion."

"Pshaw, my lord, this is nonsense. It is necessary that we should consult as to what is next to be done—for at present all is abroad again."

"As how, Mossy? As how? 'Pon soul, you'll bring yourself to an untimely end with all these starts and agitations. What's amiss now? 'Pon soul, you get more complicated every day."

"What's amiss is simply this. The girl is not hanged."

"Not hanged! Ah! that's a pity; and yet it's a thousand shames to hang any one so young and tender, except round a fellow's neck. Ha, ha, ha! Not so bad that for so early in the day—is it, Mossy?"

"You jest, my lord, at everything; and for all I know, we are in a worse position than ever we were."

"Indeed!"

"Yes—for everything seems to fail with us; while you are as careless and as heedless as ever."

"Granted; but everything, you say, has failed, while you have been as designing, as anxious, and as miserable as any roundabout involved rascal could make himself."

"My lord," said Mossy Pendell, angrily. "These taunts and reproaches come with an ill grace from you to me, and I will not endure them."

"Ha, ha!"

"No, I say I will not endure them. We are in the same boat."

"Stop! stop! 'Pon soul, you make a fellow seasick to talk of boats. Just say what's happened, and make an end of it. I have an appointment for chocolate at one with the fair Barbara Millington."

Mossy Pendell dropped his voice almost to a whisper. "You know, my lord, that the only plan for recruiting your exhausted finances was by means of a wealthy marriage; and you made a bargain with me that if I could procure for you the hand of my cousin, Lucy Everton, who would assuredly inherit the whole of her uncle's vast property, we should share the—the——"

"Plunder, Mossy, plunder. Call it plunder."

"Yes—we were to share everything."

"No, no—'pon soul, no—not the lady."

Pendell gave a slight stamp on the floor of impatience.

"Hear me out, my lord—hear me out. Lucy would not listen to you for a single moment, and therefore it became necessary to take strong measures to make her your own. You and I, with the assistance of some of those dissolute fellows that hang about the Cock-pit, and the Tennis Court by the Haymarket, seized her one evening as she returned from the Countess of Lichfield's 'Drum.' She was detained a whole night at your lordship's rooms in St. James's, and then offered a Fleet marriage to patch up her reputation."

"'Pon soul," said Lord Horlop, "you have a wonderful memory, Mossy. I dare say that all happened, but there was no reputation to patch up, for the girl was locked up in one of the guard chambers of St. James's Palace."

"I know—I know," exclaimed Pendell, impatiently. "She escaped us at the Fleet, and by her beauty and tears actually moved the hearts of the ruffianage of that place, so that we had a difficulty to escape with our lives, and she found her way home, unharmed and in security, to her uncle."

"Wonderfully true!" said Lord Horlop, as he again smelt at the snuff-box.

"From that moment we were both forbidden this house."

"Just so."

"But as I know a secret mode of entrance into it, I did not give up the game as lost; and now, but for an unfortunate accident this morning, I should have been heir-at-law to sixty thousand a year."

"Ah!" said Lord Horlop, as he yawned and stretched himself—"there is always some unfortunate accident that keeps fellows out of sixty thousand a year."

CHAPTER IV.

CLAUDE DUVAL'S NAME CHANGES THE CURRENT OF LORD HORLOP'S THOUGHTS.

"HUSH!" said Pendell.

He pointed to the apparently slumbering form of George Everton.

Slowly, and uttering moaning sounds, the suffering elderly gentleman struggled to his feet.

Acting on a sign from Pendell, Lord Horlop retired with that villanous personage behind a portion of the thickly hanging tapestry.

"I must live. I will try to live yet, for Lucy's sake. I will try to live yet."

On a side table was laid a repast, some dried fruits, some wine, some small loaves of bread, and a few light confections, such as might well tempt any one to partake of them.

With trembling hands Sir George Everton poured himself out some of the wine.

"Yes," he murmured, "yes—some of my own wine—my own Moselle. I know it well—I know it well. That cannot harm me."

He drank the wine.

He staggered backward till he reached the bed, and fell upon it with a deep sigh.

"He will sleep now," said Mossy Pendell, as he emerged from behind the tapestry—"he will sleep now for at least twelve hours. He gets feebler day by day."

"'Pon soul," said Lord Horlop, "it's almost a pity to save him up."

"I may want him. You know, my lord, that after we had both been turned from this house with ignominy and scorn, I took my measures—not only for revenge, but for the accomplishment of our purposes in another way."

"No doubt—no doubt! You always were an intricate scoundrel."

"Pshaw, my lord, pshaw! such epithets are useless. I took care that a powerful narcotic should be administered to General Everton, and that it should seem to have been given to him by Lucy. He fell into a deep sleep, which looked so like death, than an ignorant apothecary from the neighbourhood proclaimed it to be such. I then had him removed to this apartment; or rather, I may say, I removed him myself for I could trust no one. You and I, then, my lord, purchased of the sexton of All Hallows, a corpse, as nearly resembling in age as possible my uncle, Sir George, and that we placed in the state bed of the green chamber. That corpse has been to-day buried with great pomp and circumstance, as the mortal remains of my uncle."

"Stop—stop! 'Pon soul, I don't like to hear about corpses, and we will take all that for granted."

"Be it so. Lucy, however, still remained as an obstacle to my becoming possessed of my uncle's fortune, since he had made a will, and duly lodged it with his man of business, appointing her his heiress. The accusation, however, against her of having poisoned her uncle, I took care to surround with so many circumstances of apparent proof, that she was duly convicted of this seemingly atrocious crime, and was to have suffered the penalty of death this morning at Tyburn."

Lord Horlop nodded.

"But, being a felon, her property, assuming that she could ever claim under the will of the man she had murdered—which is, I understand, a moot point in law—would revert to the Crown; and, in that case, your lordship's interest would obtain a surrender from the King, and we divide between us the sixty thousand a-year."

"'Pon soul, that's about it; and since the girl is hanged, and not about my neck—since she preferred a rope to the noble arms of the Right Hon. Viscount Horlop—why I suppose all we have to do is to divide the plunder; and some of these days, you can give an over-dose of what you call your narcotic to the old General here, and bury him in earnest."

"There is a difficulty."

"Ah!"

"Yes; Lucy lives. She has been rescued, even from the scaffold."

"Rescued!"

"Yes, in the most audacious manner."

"By whom?"

"The notorious—the celebrated—the madly courageous Claude Duval."

Lord Horlop turned white, and the jewelled snuff-box fell from his nerveless hand.

"Claude Duval!" he gasped.

Mossy Pendell must have had some latent humour in his composition; for flinging himself into a chair now, he got up a very good imitation of the gay, careless manner, of Horlop, as he said, "Yes, 'pon soul, Claude Duval."

"Confusion!"

"Yes, that's it. Lucy is in the hands of Claude Duval, the great highwayman—the ladies' man—handsome, brave, insolent, and daring; and what will become of us now I know not."

"The Stadt-holder!"

"What?"

"His Majesty's Virginian settlements."

"Eh?"

"The other end of the world, or the centre of it. I tell you, Mossy Pendell, that if Claude Duval takes this matter up, the air of England will be as much too hot to hold me as though it had changed into the fiery breath of a furnace. We shall meet again to-night. Farewell—I must think—think—a process I don't like, but I must think!"

As he spoke, Lord Horlop hastily opened that narrow concealed door in the wainscot, and disappeared without uttering another word to his companion in iniquity, Mossy Pendell.

"This is something more than strange!" exclaimed Pendell; "never before have I seen Horlop so moved. But I, too, must think, or all is lost. This escape of Lucy's from the scaffold drives me to despair, and I must recover her, or good-bye to all the hopes of fortune to Mossy Pendell."

He approached the bed on which his uncle, the General, was lying.

A deep sleep had come over the aged man.

"Good!" said Pendell; "the dose of the narcotic in that one glass of wine

that he has drunk was a good one; he will sleep now for many hours; and, on every occasion that he does so, some portion of his strength and life become dissipated. And yet I know not whether I may not require him now rather to live than to die. I must think—I must think; and in the meantime lie thou there, General Sir George Everton."

With a bitter laugh, Mossy Pendell turned from the room, leaving it by the same means that Lord Ho lop had availed himself of.

A deep stillness then reigned in that secret chamber, only faintly now and then broken by the heavy breathing of the slumbering man who had become the victim of his nephew's grasping and avaricious spirit.

* * * * *

"Halt we a moment!" cried Claude Duval, as his horse, Nightshade, with its double burden, reached the brow of that first hill on the road to Hampstead, to the left of which stands the white-fronted cottage, once the residence of Steele, the essayist; and to the right, the ancient hostel known as the "Load of Hay," then a notorious resort for knights of the road.

"Halt for a moment, fair Lucy Everton! Look back, dear girl, upon that London we have now left far behind us, and tell me if you see signs of pursuit, or if you hear a single cry of danger on this balmy air?"

"I am saved—I am saved!" cried Lucy. "I am saved by you! and the devotion of a life—that life which now surely belongs to you, since but for you, by this time, it would have been quenched for ever——"

"No, Miss Everton," interrupted Claude Duval. "I am but a wild, wayward fellow, but the heart and feelings of a gentleman still linger in my breast. It was the impulse of a moment that made me ask you to be mine on the scaffold when the bullets of the guard were whistling over us."

"And I promised."

"You did: but I release you from the promise. No, Miss Everton, it shall never be said that Claude Duval took such an advantage, even where his heart had garnered up its choicest treasure. I—I release you, Miss Everton—you are free!"

"With all your heart?"

"No: it is not with all my heart that I release you; it is because I feel I ought to do so; and she who becomes the wife of Claude Duval must not be in the position when the question is asked her, to fancy the word 'No' will step between her and her life. Miss Everton, I again say that you are perfectly free. I am your humble servant; or, perhaps, what is better, your attached friend. Say to me where you would wish to go, and my horse Nightshade shall carry you fleet as yonder clouds that skim over this fair April sky. You hear me, Miss Everton?"

"You called me Lucy!"

"I—I did not mean it—it was disrespectful."

"Not if I call you Claude?"

"But—but you won't—you don't! Oh, Miss Everton—Lucy, dear Lucy—there, I will dismount—I will leave you to yourself—take the reins in your hand. One touch, and Nightshade will carry you off wherever you wish, far beyond pursuit."

"Claude!"

"Again, Again!—she calls me Claude again!"

"I have no home—I have no friends. My good old uncle, Sir George Everton, is no more. I am proscribed and branded as one not fit to live, and yet I am innocent. Tell me—tell me before I add another word—that you believe me innocent!"

"I do; as truly as that I believe we stand upon the solid earth, and that there is a heaven, above us."

"Then I am yours, and yours only, Claude. The promise I made you on the scaffold, I here, in safety and security, ratify"

"No, no!" cried Duval,—“no, no!”

“You say no to me?”

“One moment, dear girl—you know not whom and what I am!”

“Yes—you are gallant and brave; you are my preserver!”

“And I am Claude Duval! Have you never heard that name, Lucy?”

A flush came over the face of the young girl.

“Ah, I perceive that you have heard it! You have been told something of me—perhaps that there is a price upon my head—that I am a fugitive from justice. And the thought will recur to you that Claude Duval, the highwayman, is no fitting husband for the gently-nurtured Lucy Everton.”

“No thought recurs to me,” she replied, “but that you have saved me.”

As she spoke, she stretched out both her hands towards him.

He clasped them in his, and looked with fervent affection in the face of the girl.

“Mine—mine!” he cried; “and for ever! My fate looks dark and stormy at this present time; but floating in imagination. I seem to see an airy coronet which I may yet place upon your brow.”

“I seek for nothing but your dear affection. Take me with you, Claude; I trust you with all my heart.”

“Yes, Lucy, as my *wife* I will take you with me; and, in order that it may be so, we will seek yonder spire. Look how it peeps up from among the trees.”

“It is the old church of Hampstead; but we cannot be married in this fashion, Claude.”

“Fashion!” cried Duval as he looked at his dress.

“Nay, I did not mean that; but there are forms and ceremonies. Do you not know, Claude, that we must be asked in church, or procure a license from the Bishop?”

“Lucy!”

“I listen to you, Claude.”

“Will you be content if your hand is placed in mine, fairly and honestly, at the altar, by a true and veritable clergyman, who shall perform the ordinary ceremony without the asking or the Bishop’s license?”

“Ah, Claude! that can only be done with those wretched Fleet marriages, as they are called: and you would not take me to such a place, even to call me yours.”

“No, Lucy; but we’ll extend the privileges of the Fleet to Hampstead Church. So on we go again. Forward, Nightshade—forward!”

It was well that Duval lingered no longer on that rural eminence, for even as Nightshade, still with its double burden, galloped fleetly over the level bit of ground before reaching Red Lion Hill, a party of horsemen emerged from Pancras Vale, and with shouts, and cries, and animated gestures, proclaimed that they saw the fugitives.

“We are pursued,” cried Lucy.

“Possibly,” replied Duval, “but not caught. Fear nothing; I have been pursued the greater part of my life, and I am not likely now to allow myself to be captured, when it has a hundred times increased in value.”

The pursuers’ horses had not the remotest chance in an actual race with Nightshade.

By the time they had breasted the first hill, Claude Duval had galloped into the little village, which it then was, of Hampstead.

He made his way direct to the old church.

“Leap, Nightshade—leap, leap!”

The rough stone paling of the churchyard was cleared at a bound.

“Murder, murder! Mercy upon us! What’s this? A mad horse, and two mad people on his back! Help! Murder! Mercy on us, as I’m a sinner!”

The beadle of Hampstead Church happened just to have opened the door

of that edifice from the inside as Claude Duval alighted within a dozen paces of him.

"Capital!" shouted Duval. "We shall win the wager."

"Wager, sir?"

"Yes, a hundred guineas and a gold cup. You shall have the guineas, and I will keep the cup. Open the door—out of the way!"

"Goodness gracious, sir! you're not going to ride full gallop into the church?"

The beadle still stood in the doorway ; but, as he saw Nightshade preparing for a leap, he raised a shout of terror, and stooped low down.

There was a clatter and a rush, and Nightshade, still with its double burden, flew like an arrow over the beadle's back right into the church.

CHAPTER V.

CLAUDE DUVAL PERSONATES A HIGH OFFICIAL, AND BAFFLES THE OFFICERS AT HAMPSTEAD CHURCH.

Duval dismounted instantly.

The beadle was running off on all fours.

"Halt, my good friend! We shall want you to play the father."

"Murder, murder! I can't! I never played the father in 'all my life."

"It's time you began," cried Duval; and jerking the beadle round as he spoke, he guided him into the church, instead of away from it.

"Stop him—stop him! A highwayman—a highwayman! It's a thousand pounds reward! Claude Duval—Claude Duval! Stop him—stop him!"

"Ah!" cried Duval, "the plot thickens. There are our friends from Pancras Vale."

Half-a-dozen mounted officers of the police, with Muckles, the chief constable of Bow-street, at their head, came dashing down Church street.

Duval made his arrangements instantly.

He caught the unfortunate and mystified beadle by the collar, and propped him up against a pew. In another moment he had taken from him his ample blue official coat, with its gold lace cuffs and edging, and its ample capes.

With the celerity of a harlequin, Duval slipped this garment over his own light and agile form.

The huge cocked hat of the beadle he pressed low upon his brows.

"That ought to do," he said. "Ah, this is better than ever!"

Reposing in a corner was the long official staff of the beadle, with a gilt ball and cross at the end of it.

Duval had just time to seize it as a thundering appeal came at the door.

"Open—open! He came this way! Open—open! Is any one in the church? Open in the name of the law!"

Bang, bang, bang! went the constables' staves against the old oaken door.

"We are lost!" ejaculated Lucy.

"I think not," said Duval. "Lead the horse on one side and keep out of sight, if you love me. Ah, Lucy! we commence our wedded life with peril, but it may be none the less sweet."

"Open—open!"

The clamour at the church door continued.

"Certainly, gentlemen—certainly," cried Duval.

He opened the door just sufficient to thrust out the beadle's staff violently into the face of Muckles, and to show some portion of the official coat and hat.

"[Idiot!]" roared the officer.

"Yes, gentlemen, I am an idiot. I've been an idiot a matter of forty year in this parish, and that's why I was made the beetle."

"Knock the fool down—brain him!"

Duval fenced rather skilfully with the beadle's staff, and dealt another of the officers such a crack on the side of the head with it, that he retired at once from the contest in disgust and discomfiture.

"It's brawling in the church," cried Duval. "Fifty pounds penalty, and a month in the stocks. Get away, all of you, and be quiet, while I runs up to the belfry and rings a halarm."

"Let me speak to the fool," said Muckles. "Have you seen a man in a crimson velvet coat and a hat and feather, mounted on a black horse, with a young girl behind him?"

"A crimson man," said Duval, "with a black horse behind him, mounted on a feather! What do you mean, stupid?"

"The fellow's an idiot!"

"I told you I was, and the father of a family, too. What do you mean by coming here, and talking of young girls and black men with crimson feathers? You're worser a good deal than that fellow on the mad horse that galloped past a little while ago, and cried out, 'Hurrah for Claude——' somebody or something—I don't like to say it on the porch of the blessed church."

"He means Duval. Was it Duval?"

"It was that, or the name of the t'other gentleman, only spelt a little different."

"This is important information," cried Muckles. "We might have questioned this born natural for half-an-hour, and not got so much from him. Duval has evidently passed this way, and if so he has made for the Heath. Forward, comrades—forward! We may have him down yet with a long shot."

"I don't think it is very likely," said Claude, as he closed the church door. "Now, Mr. Beadle, there is your coat and hat, and many thanks for the use of them. Nay, Lucy dearest, do not look so pale; Claude Duval's time has not come yet, and he has many adventures by road and heath to go through before the grim hand of death closes upon him. But we will not talk gloomily. There—sit there, my sweet girl, and believe that all will yet be well. Stop, sir!"

The beadle was slowly making his way towards the door.

"Have mercy upon me!"

"Come here."

"Yes, your majesty—yes. Ha, ha! It's a fine day, with a little rain, but nothing to speak of. 'Happy is the corpse that the sun rains upon, and happy is the bride'——That's not it. 'Sacred to the memory of Mrs. Plumming——'"

The intellect of the beadle was fast fading away, but Claude Duval partially restored it by seizing him by the hand, and placing on the broad palm a guinea.

"Do you comprehend that?"

"Bless us all!"

"And that—and that—and that?"

A guinea accompanied each word.

"A gentleman," said the beadle, "as is a gentleman."

"There, there—I know all that. I want you to go to the clergyman of this church, and tell him that a lady and gentleman are here, desiring to see him on particular business."

"And a 'oss."

Duval laughed.

"Come, Mr. Beadle, that is not so bad for you; and now understand me.

This is a twenty guinea job. Go to your clergyman, and open your mouth just wide enough to deliver my message, and no wider. If you add another word I'll skin you alive; but be discreet, and the twenty guineas are yours."

The beadle drew a long breath.

"I'm not quite such a fool, sir, as I look."

"I thought not. Be off with you. Lucy dearest, let me see a smile upon your lips. Have I the privilege to kiss away those tears that glisten in your eyes? Ah, yes! and yet you tremble. Believe me, the danger has passed away."

"Oh, Claude—Claude! all this tumultuous life is so new to me. And yet what horrors I have passed through this last fortnight! A trial, a condemnation, the expectation of a painful and disagreeable death!"

Lucy clasped her hands over her face.

"Think not of it!" cried Duval. "Let it pass away like the visions of some troubled dream. Hush! I hear a footstep! Nightshade, come hither. Who knows but you are as worthy an occupant of this family pew as ever sat in it?"

The door creaked open, and a quiet, gentlemanly-looking man in black walked into the church, followed by the beadle.

"Who is it wishes to see me?" he said mildly.

"I, sir," cried Claude,—“I and this young lady. We both wish to see you if you, are as I presume, the clergyman of this church.”

"I am."

"Then, sir, I put a case of conscience and of morals to you. We wish to be married. Accident has thrown us together in such a fashion that we must cling together—she to me for protection to her life, although she is as innocent a creature as ever breathed the air of heaven—and I to her because I love her, and am perhaps the only man in all this kingdom who can save her. We have not been asked in church—we have no license from your bishop—but, as I say, we must cling together; let us do so with as much holiness and as much ceremony as we may. Marry us, sir, and let us feel that in all essentials we have pledged ourselves to each other at heaven's altar, although some previous little ceremonies may have been omitted."

"I dare not!"

"Say not so, sir! I am a man who dares much, and often what is wrong. Now, sir, I call upon you to dare do something that is right!"

"I should incur great censure! I cannot do it!"

"On, sir, there are reasons!"

"Twenty reasons," murmured the beadle.

The clergyman shook his head.

"Well, Lucy," said Duval, "you see how I have striven to make our union honest. Come then, with me, and as the dear sister of Claude Duval —"

"Of whom?" cried the clergyman.

"Claude Duval, the highwayman, with a thousand pounds reward upon his head!"

"And yet with good enough in him to speak to me as he has done? I will marry you!"

"Bless you all!" said the beadle. "I'm a father. I'm a family man as well as a beadle. I'll run and get your gown, sir. Shall I ring the bells, Mr. C. D.?"

"Hold!" said the clergyman, as the beadle was darting out of the church. "The surplice is in the vestry, and I shall require no more. This ceremony will be imperfect; but better that than none at all."

In ten minutes more Lucy leant upon the arm of Claude Duval, as much his wife as so strange a marriage could possibly make her.

"A thousand thanks!" cried Duval. "It may be, sir, that we shall both

come to you under happier auspices; and, in the meantime, think as gently as you can of Claude Duval, the highwayman."

As Duval spoke, he threw a heavy purse to the beadle; and turning to the family pew, he called out, "Nightshade—Nightshade, hoy!"

The obedient horse trotted out from his place of concealment.

The clergyman shook his head.

"You are a strange mixture, Claude Duval," he said, "of good and bad thoughts and impulses. Begone now, lest some danger assail you; and I pray to heaven that the day will come when a feeling for some better mode of life will dawn upon you."

"Thanks! still thanks!" cried Duval. "I know you mean me well."

"Fire!" shouted a voice. "Now we have him?"

A sudden report, a blaze of light, and a puff of white smoke into the church, followed this exclamation.

From a window at the back a man's head and arm projected into the sacred edifice, and Claude Duval had no difficulty in recognising his persistent foe, Muckles, the officer.

"No!" cried Duval, as he stepped before Lucy; "you don't have him yet!"

It is a difficult thing to hit an object firing at it from an eminence; and as Muckles was in that relative position to Claude Duval, the bullet only struck the stone floor of the church at his feet, where it flattened itself into an irregular shaped disc of metal.

"It's my turn now," said Duval.

Bang! went one of Claude's pistols.

There was a crash of glass and a yell.

Mr. Muckles disappeared.

"I owe you a thousand apologies, reverend sir," said Duval to the clergyman; "but you saw I was assailed first, and self-defence is a law of nature. Follow, Nightshade, follow! Ho, good horse! ho!"

Claude Duval caught up Lucy in his arms, and ran out of the church with her, closely followed by his horse.

He mounted instantly, and assisting Lucy to assume her old position behind him, he was on the point of starting off at a gallop, when, with cries and shouts, the officers came from the back of the church, scrambling over the old tombstones, and calling to each other not to be afraid, which was a tolerably good sign of their fear.

Bang! went another of Claude's pistols.

The officers came to a standstill.

Gentlemen all," said Duval, "if you want me, I make an appointment with you for midnight, on Hampstead Heath."

As he spoke, he touched the bridle of Nightshade, and was off at a gallop that it would have been in vain to follow, through the little village of Hampstead, and on to the Heath, in one of its wildest and most picturesque parts.

There was a small cottage, made of weather-boards, which had gone greatly to decay, and which appeared to be in the occupation of an old woman, who, at the identical moment when Claude Duval reached the Heath, was hanging out some dilapidated garments to dry in the little garden attached to the humble dwelling.

"Look back, Lucy," said Claude, "and tell me if you see our foes."

"Yes—oh, yes! they are on the verge of the Heath. We are lost, surely, now!"

"No; I mean to give them a little surprise."

Claude faced about his horse towards the officers, and, lifting his hat in his right hand, he pointed with it to the little cottage.

Giving Nightshade then the rein, he leaped the fence which surrounded the

little bit of garden-ground, and calling to Lucy to stoop, he dashed through the open doorway of the cottage, and stood, horse and all, beneath its humble roof.

"Can this be safety?" said Lucy.

"Yes, dear one; and you will see that it is so directly."

The room of the cottage was furnished and appointed like a kitchen; the most noticeable article in which was a dresser, which had a flat foundation of wood-work that covered a space in the earthen floor some six feet in length, and four in width.

"Hold the reins, Lucy; I will now show you Claude Duval's cavern on the Heath."

He rapidly dismounted; and seizing the dresser we have spoken of by one end, he easily shifted it aside, disclosing beneath it a sloping orifice, the descent of which was very rapid.

"Dame! dame!" he called,—*"Dame Ingledew!"*

"I am here—I am here," said the old woman who had been hanging out the clothes,—*"I am here to bless you and to pray for you ever!"*

"Hush! that will do."

"You saved my poor boy; and the blessing of the widow and the fatherless——"

"There—there!" cried Claude, "that will do. Don't be troublesome. Lucy, this does not look much like a bridal chamber, unless we were a couple of worms going home after a shower. But will you venture down here with me?"

"With you anywhere."

"Hold on, then, to Nightshade's bridle, and follow us."

Claude Duval commenced the descent himself, and the horse half-walked half-slipped, after him backwards.

Lucy, as she had been directed, held on to the bridle of Nightshade.

In this fashion they all three disappeared from the surface of the earth, and old Dame Ingledew restored the dresser to its proper position.

The officers, who had halted on the brink of the Heath, could see quite plainly that Claude Duval had entered this little cottage.

They looked upon their prey as certain, and only waited till the whole of their party had ridden up to advance the attack.

Mr. Muckles looked scratched and bruised; but he was otherwise none the worse for his tumble from the church-window.

The fact was, that the bullet from Claude's pistol had struck the framework to which he was holding, and so precipitated him into the church-yard.

"Now we have him! now we have him!" he cried. "He must be mad to take refuge in such a place as that. Forward, comrades, forward! Remember the thousand pounds reward!"

The speed and eagerness of the officers sensibly diminished as they approached the cottage.

"Surrender, Claude Duval!" shouted Muckles. "We must and will have you now; and it will only make your case so much the worse if you resist us. Surrender! and I promise you good treatment."

Old Dame Ingledew looked at the party of officers with an air of surprise.

"What would you please to want, gentleman?"

"We want Claude Duval."

"Who did you say, gentlemen?"

"Out of the way! out of the way! we want the man on horseback, with the girl behind him, who leaped this fence and entered the cottage, and we mean to have him?"

"Deary me, gentlemen! there's no man on horseback here. I'm a lone woman, and take in washing. There's many people come to the Heath on

Sundays, too, and want a cup of tea; but I don't know anything about men on horses."

The suspicious silence inside the cottage by no means raised the courage of Muckles and his party.

Still, something must be done; and by a great effort of hardihood Muckles himself crossed the fence and looked in at the little latticed window.

"Claude Duval!" he cried, "I have had a shot at you, and you have had one at me, which makes us even; and I'm sure you are not the sort of a man to take a fellow's life for doing his duty."

There was no reply to this speech, and Muckles gathered courage to open the door of the cottage, and beckon his men to advance.

The horses were yoked together, and the bridle of one fastened round a young sapling close to the garden-gate.

With their pistols in their hands, and looking as vigilant and cautious as though they expected each moment to fall into some ambuscade, the officers entered the cottage.

There was no Claude Duval.

Two rooms and a little out-house or scullery comprised the whole premises, which were looked over in half a minute so effectually as to convince every one that there could not possibly be any place of concealment for either man or horse.

A strange expression of fright slowly crept over the faces of the officers.

The disappearance of Claude Duval partook so much of the supernatural, that they began to look upon the place as dangerous and haunted ground.

With one accord they turned to the old dame and questioned her.

"Do you mean to tell us that no man on horseback leaped the garden fence and came into the cottage?"

"Bless us and save us!" ejaculated the old woman, "do you think such a thing could happen and me not see it?"

"I can't make it out," said Muckles. "We must come to-town and make our report. This is something beyond me; and if I'd been alone I should have thought myself a little cracked; but we can't all be deceived. You saw him, Sturgiss; and you, Ambrose?"

"Yes, Mr. Muckles, we all saw him."

"And then, like a wreath of smoke, he disappears, carrying Lucy Everton with him. Let us to town, for our game's up on Hempstead Heath."

CHAPTER VI.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS LUCY EVERTON A HAUNTED HOME.

"FEAR nothing, Lucy," cried Claude Duval; "we shall pass from darkness to light."

"I can fear nothing," was the gentle and affectionate reply,— "I can fear nothing, Claude, for am I not with you, my husband?"

Lucy Everton held with both hands by the bridle of Nightshade, and accomplished the steep and rather mysterious descent from the floor of the cottage on the Heath in safety.

At first the darkness was indeed most profound; but as the flooring became level, and there was no longer a necessity for holding so closely to the horse in order to render the foothold more secure, Lucy began to see a faint gleam of light before her.

The kind of earthen passage, too, in which they were, widened considerably, so that there was room for Claude Duval to turn Nightshade com-

pletely round and take the bridle himself, while he flung the disengaged arm round the slender waist of Lucy.

"This is a strange home," he said, "dear one, to bring you to, but it shall not be so melancholy as it looks, and we will soon exchange it for a better."

"It is a most mysterious place, Claude."

"It is my cavern on the Heath, and more than once it has stood me in good stead when hotly pursued. Now, you see, Lucy, we have light enough."

"We have indeed, and that seems to me the most mysterious part of the affair."

Claude laughed slightly as he held her gently to his breast.

"Tell me now, Lucy, dear love of mine, tell me what you really think of this subterranean place?"

"I scarcely know what to think," replied Lucy, as she gazed around her both with wonder and pleasure. "There is a sadness about it, and yet it is beautiful in its perfect novelty."

"In truth, it has its beauties."

"We tread upon a floor of fine bright sand; but it is the ceiling and roof above us that excites my wonder. I see what looks like thousands of interlacing stems of trees, through which come glaring bright gleams of daylight."

"And that is all true, Lucy. Those interlacing stems you see are the roots of the old trees and bushes upon the Heath. They extend, you see, down the sides of this cavernous place, seeking for nourishment amid congenial soils."

"But the daylight, Claude?"

"I can explain that to you. The outer roof of this cavern is on a dangerous slope, where only a goat or a cat could find foothold; therefore no one has an opportunity of noticing these little cracks, and fissures, and orifices amid the roots of the old trees and bushes."

"But do you live here, Claude?"

"Not exactly. This is but a royal thoroughfare to an old deserted mansion on the Heath, which has the reputation of being haunted, and is accordingly shunned by all the neighbourhood."

"Ah!" said Lucy, "I have heard of it. It is called Boscowan House."

"True—true! But oh, Lucy, how selfish I am! You are pale, and your hands tremble. Do I, indeed, forget all the terrors and excitements of this day to you? Lean on me, dear one; or rather, let me carry you the remainder of the route."

"Nay, Claude, I can walk, resting thus upon your arm; but the excitement of to-day have, indeed, been great. First brought out to die, and then saved by means that looked little short of miraculous!"

"And then married!" added Duval.

"Ah, Claude! Shall I say that that has added to the sufferings of this April day?"

"No, Lucy, such words need never pass your lips. But now, you see, we have passed through this cavernous recess, and we ascend again to the upper air."

The cavernous place narrowed, so that it was with difficulty that Claude Duval and Lucy could walk side by side.

Moreover, the ascent was so abrupt and steep, that, but for the protecting arm of Claude, Lucy felt how impossible it would have been for her to have proceeded.

In fact, the narrow route they now took to reach the surface of the earth, was a counterpart of the descent from Dame Ingledew's cottage.

Duval reached up one of his hands above his head, and pushed aside some

loose planks, which, from the rattling sound above them, seemed to displace a quantity of loose rubbish.

The daylight again shone in upon them.

"Now, Lucy, said Duval, "we are in a little out-house in the grounds of Boscowan Ho" let me assist you up and welcome you home."

"Home?" said Lucy, with a smile. "Is this better than the cavern?"

"Not nearly so good; so we will leave it to Nightshade, who is not very particular about his accommodation."

Lucy clung still closer to Claude Duval, for it seemed to her, now that they were emerging fairly into the open air, that she must be in great danger.

"Calm yourself, dear one," he said; "all is well, and there are no prying eyes to discover the whereabouts of Claude Duval or Lucy Everton."

He opened the door of the little out-house as he spoke, and Lucy was perfectly charmed with the view that presented itself.

An avenue of lime-trees—the interlacing boughs overhead forming a perfect leafy canopy—wound onwards in sylvan beauty, apparently to a great distance.

"Come, Lucy," said Duval; "we are shut in by a thousand trees. This little estate of Boscowan, in addition to its ghostly reputation, has no known owner; and has been for many a year deserted."

"Except by you, Claude!"

"As you say, Lucy; and now you can see the house, or such a bit as is left to be seen by the trailing plants and wild vines, that have run riot over it from chimney-pot to basement."

"Oh, this is delightful!" cried Lucy, as she clasped her hands. "This house is the very romance of beauty!"

Claude reflected the smile of pleasure that was upon her face, as, opening a small door, three-parts concealed by ivy, he led her into the mansion.

Lucy drew back with alarm.

A subdued murmur, like the shout of many voices from a distance, came upon their ears.

"Fear nothing," said Duval; "they are friends of mine."

He placed a whistle to his lips, and blew one long, wailing sound.

Immediately all was still as the grave in the old house.

"We are now in the ancient hall," said Claude. "Yonder staircase will lead you to a suite of rooms in which you will find much of the remains of former magnificence."

"Am I to go alone?"

"In your own house?" smiled Claude.

"If you desire it."

"Fear nothing, Lucy; no human footstep but yours and mine will ascend these stairs. They are rough spirits that I have here as companions, but they stand in awe of me; and my slightest wish becomes a law they never dream of breaking."

"Shall I not obey you now, Claude, on this my first day of promise so to do?"

He held her in his arms a brief moment, and then whispered to her with emotion.

"Go, Lucy, and arrange your new home as you would wish it. This brief April day is passing away, and already the shadows of the tall trees are lengthening upon the Heath. I have some work to do, but will rejoin you before the moon has climbed a third of its height in the blue sky."

Claude Duval watched the retreating form of Lucy as she slowly ascended the ancient staircase of the mansion, now and then pausing, as she did so, to look back and wave her hand to him

Then, when she had wholly disappeared, he sighed deeply.

"I fear—I fear," he said, "that I may not make her happy; and yet the wish to do so is surely one half the battle. But I have work upon the Heath to-night, and already it is getting shadowy."

He looked out at the little door by which they had entered the mansion.

A white mist was gathering in the lower portions of the Heath, and a silvery brightness in the eastern horizon proclaimed the approach of the moon, which was then nearly at its full.

Duval then opened a door in the hall, and traversed two or three apartments.

He descended three steps, and rapped in a peculiar fashion at a strong oaken door.

The moment before he so rapped, a murmur of voices had come upon his ears.

Now, however, all was still, and the door itself cracked open as if from no human agency.

Duval passed through it.

The place to which it led was dim and ecclesiastical-looking; and had, in fact, in Catholic times, been an old chapel attached to the mansion.

The floor was deeply littered with straw.

A table, with some rude benches, occupied the centre of the chapel, and on that table burnt a lantern, shedding a dim sepulchral light about it.

But nothing human appeared to be in the place.

Duval advanced to the table, and struck it with his clenched hand

"Are all here?" he asked.

"All!" replied a voice.

"Blossom returned?"

"Returned!" was the answer.

"One hour hence, then, see that the shadows show well upon the whitened wall, and now appear."

Various small openings in the walls of the chapel were now made manifest by the opening of concealed doors, through which emerged eight men, each bearing a lantern.

"Welcome, Captain!" they shouted. "Hurrah for the road and the heath! We were getting rusty!"

"You have done me good service to-day," said Duval. "I know you do not love this place, with its melancholy shades and sighing night wind; so, after this night, I no longer require you here. We will meet again in the old house in West Street, Smithfield; but you must play the shadows for the special benefit of a couple of lords from the Court, who have laid a wager to cross the Heath thrice to-night in defiance of Claude Duval!"

"It shall be done, Captain—it shall be done!"

"To your posts, then, all of you! I can see the moon's edge over the furze-bushes on the Heath!"

As he spoke, Duval left the place; and making his way rapidly to the outside, where he had left Nightshade, he mounted, and keeping his way through the thick growth of underwood, which the gardens presented in all directions, he finally leaped a low paling; and as the moonlight shone in brilliant beauty over the verdant scene, he was fairly on the Heath.

Duval then took off his hat, and dexterously made such alterations in its shape, that it assumed a very common, slouching appearance.

Taking off his elegant and richly-trimmed crimson velvet coat, he turned the sleeves inside out, and put it on in that fashion, when it presented all the appearance of a dull, grey, ordinary garment, such as some person of neither fashion nor repute might wear.

Duval then bent low in the saddle, and listened.

"Good!" he cried—"they come! I hear the tramp of horse's feet."

There was a well-trodden road across the common, and on to that Duval soon made his way in a right line without heeding either chasm or bush in his way, for Nightshade leaped both with unerring instinct.

Claude listened again.

From the direction of London there came evidently the sound of horses' feet, as well as the faint echo of voices.

"Now, Nightshade, boy!" said Duval, as he patted his sagacious steed on the neck—"now, Nightshade, lame—lame—lame—lame, Nightshade,—lame, boy!"

This was a trick Duval had taught his horse.

It was to show lameness.

Nightshade lifted up one fore-foot, as though all its tendons were stiffened, and brought it down again in a limping fashion.

Claude Duval began to sing, in a droning voice,—

" 'Oh, its my delight, on a shiny night,
To ride by the light of the moon.'

Woa, Dobbin, woa! Pluck up a spirit, do, and let's get past the haunted house! Don't you look, Dobbin, and I won't! Bless us! I wouldn't see them shadows on the walls of Boscowan Gardens for my best cow—that I wouldn't!"

"Hilloa, you fellow!—hilloa!" cried an imperious voice. "Who may you be, and where are you going?"

A couple of horsemen, well mounted, galloped up, one on each side of Claude Duval.

CHAPTER VII.

CLAUDE DUVAL DECIDES AN IMPORTANT WAGER ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH.

"SAVE you, gentlemen!" cried Claude,—“save you, gentlemen, and a pleasant evening!”

"And who may you be, fellow?"

"A poor man, your worships!"

"We didn't ask you if you were poor or rich; but do you live hereabouts?"

"Can your Grace doubt it?" said the other. "Look at his lame horse. It's a hop and a jump, and could not carry him a mile, if it were to die for it!"

Both the gentlemen laughed.

"Come, my friend," said the first speaker, "we don't want to hurt your feelings, or those of your elderly nag; but do you live on the Heath?"

"Save us! no, sir! I live at Northend—right away yonder."

"You are a bold man!"

"I, your honour! It don't become the likes of me to be bold!"

"Oh, I mean, to trust yourself on a horse with three legs only!"

Both the gentlemen again laughed.

"He does well enough for I!" said Duval, humbly.

"Very likely—very likely!" cried one of the horsemen. "But tell me, my honest fellow—assuming you to be such,—did you ever hear of Claude Duval, the great highwayman?"

"Bless you, sir! don't speak of him here, on Hampstead Heath!"

"And why not?"

"Because, sir, it ain't quite safe!"

"Not safe?"

"No, sir. Claude Duval is here, there, and everywhere; and sometimes when you least expect it, he's close at hand!"

"Hark ye, my friend!" said the gentleman who had been called "your Grace,"—"I rather suspect you know more of this Claude Duval than you would like to own to; and if you do, and should happen to see him, you can tell him that two gentlemen have had a wager, that, in defiance of himself and any gang he may have at his heels, they will cross and re-cross Hampstead Heath three times to-night, and dare him to interfere with them."

"It don't need no telling," said Duval.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Because, you see, sirs, he's sure to find it out of himself; and as for having a gang at his heels when there's only two men to attack, Claude Duval is not very likely to do so."

To the astonishment of the two gentlemen, the apparently lame horse of the ignorant farmer they thought they were speaking to suddenly made a tremendous leap forward, and facing about, confronted them both in the clear moonlight that now spread its radiance right over the Heath without the slightest appearance of lameness or decrepitude.

"Halt!" cried Duval. "Your money or your lives; or both, if you prefer it, gentlemen!"

As he spoke, he drew his holster pistols, and letting the reins drop upon the neck of Nightshade, who stood still as a statue, he presented a weapon at the head of each of the noblemen.

The suddenness of this movement was so great, that neither of the horsemen had time to make the least show of resistance.

Simultaneously, however, they cried, in excited accents, "Who—who—who can you be?"

"Who should I be but Claude Duval? Come, gentlemen, you have lost your wager, and it becomes your rank and condition to lose it with a good grace!"

"Villain!"

"Scoundrel!"

"Come, come, gentlemen, no hard words, or the reply to them may come in such a shape as will be specially uncomfortable! My pistols are loaded, my fingers on the triggers; and, at times, gentlemen, I am apt to be short of temper!"

One of the noblemen then muttered some very unaristocratic imprecations.

The other one spoke more mildly.

"I have no difficulty," he said, "in believing you to be Claude Duval; and I presume we must admit our defeat. We will turn back, and go our way, while you go yours."

"Not so fast, Marquis!"

"Marquis! You know me?"

"Perfectly well. You rejoice in the title of Marquis; while your companion is one of England's oldest Dukes!"

"It matters not," cried the Duke, "who and what we are! We have no desire to meet so inglorious a death as that from the pistol of a highwayman!"

"Precisely so," replied Claude; "but you will allow me to state that, according to the terms of your wager with Prince Frederick of Wales——"

Both the noblemen started, and looked at each other in surprise.

"You were," added Claude, "to come to the Heath with your watches and purses, as usual. If you returned with them, you were to win your wager; otherwise, you lose it!"

"Confusion!" muttered the Duke.

"The fellow is in league with the fiend himself!" said the Marquis.

"And so, gentlemen," added Duval, "I will trouble you for those same watches and purses, or you will be so good as to take the consequences!"

"And those consequences?"

"Will be a couple of pistol-shots, which will leave two interesting vacancies in the House of Lords! Quick, sirs! I will parley with you no longer. You made a wager and you have lost it! Pay it like gentlemen and men of honour!"

Nightshade made a dart forward, which brought him close to the two noblemen; so close, indeed, that the barrels of Claude's pistols touched their breasts.

The Duke turned pale.

It was a paleness that was manifest even in the moonlight.

With a trembling hand, he presented his watch to Duval.

"Be so good," said Claude, "as to drop it in this side pocket, in the skirt of my coat. You see, gentlemen, my hands are both engaged; and although my horse is sagacious enough to be lame when I wish him, I have not yet taught him to take purses and watches."

The Duke, with a very bad grace, dropped his massive watch and seals into the pocket indicated by Claude Duval.

"Now, your Grace, the purse if you please!"

The purse followed the watch.

The Marquis now laughed outright.

He was a higher-hearted man, and of a gayer disposition, than the Duke.

"Claude Duval!" he cried, "you are a brave fellow; and if I had known half as much of you as I know now, I should have had no such wager as that which has brought us to Hampstead Heath to-night! You shall have my watch and purse with pleasure; and there they are"

"No, Marquis," said Claude, "you shall win, and my Lord Duke here shall lose."

As he spoke, Claude removed the pistol from its dangerous proximity to the breast of the Marquis, and replaced it in the holster of the saddle.

"Beware!" cried the Marquis.

Claude smiled.

"I am well armed, Claude Duval; and have now the opportunity of reversing our relative situation."

The Marquis took from his saddle a beautifully ornamented and silver-mounted pistol, which he presented full at the face of Claude Duval.

Still Claude smiled.

"Now," said the Marquis, "I can win my wager in a canter, and cry 'Stand and Deliver!' to the highwayman."

"There is no danger," said Claude. "The Marquis of Harcourt is not the man to be outdone in generosity, even by a highwayman on Hampstead Heath!"

"Shoot him—shoot him!" cried the Duke. "Shoot him, Harcourt! The fellow's a fool as well as a highway robber!"

"No, my Lord Duke; no fellow's a fool who trusts to the honour and generosity of the Marquis of Harcourt!"

As he spoke, the Marquis returned the pistol to his saddle.

"You are mad, Harcourt,—you are mad!" cried the Duke. "You had the fellow at your mercy!"

"That was just it, your Grace. But the reason that I had him at my mercy was because he trusted me. There, Claude Duval, there is my watch, and there is my purse. Take them both, and welcome. I shall not be ashamed, now, to own that I lost my wager on Hampstead Heath, and that I found Claude Duval, the highwayman, something more."

"Something more, Marquis?" cried the Duke. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I found him a man of honour; and henceforth he must be called Claude Duval, the gentleman highwayman. And now, your Grace, the sooner we get to town, the better, and own our defeat."

"This is intolerable!" cried the Duke. "One would think that you, Harcourt, were a highwayman yourself."

"If ever I should be," laughed the Marquis, "let me be such an one as we have met to-night. Farewell, Claude Duval, the gentleman highwayman."

The Marquis slightly raised his hat; and then, facing his horse towards London, he galloped from the Heath.

The Duke hesitated a moment; and then, instead of raising his hat, he gave it a blow on the crown, which thrust it nearly right down to his eyes.

"Claude Duval!" he said, "I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope not," said Duval; "for I am not partial to indifferent company"

"You shall bitterly repent to-night's work."

Duval laughed.

The Duke glared about him as though desirous of taking so accurate an observation of the spot that it should ever live in his memory.

"Your Grace," said Duval, "seems enamoured of this pretty picturesque eminence on Hampstead Heath."

"I wish to note it well," said the Duke, speaking with bitterness; "because after your execution at Tyburn, I mean to have you brought here and hung in chains as a terror to other evil doers."

"Another wager!" cried Duval.

"A what?"

"A wager, my Lord Duke. I bet you this watch and seals which you have recently handed to me, that you shall hang in chains here on this spot on Hampstead Heath before twelve months are over."

The Duke made no reply, but bending low in the saddle, he struck his spurs savagely into his horse's flanks, and galloped from the Heath.

Claude Duval hummed a gay tune as he took off his hat and re-arranged it in its ordinary fashion.

He turned his coat again, and presented in the moonlight the richly dressed figure which we have previously described.

Patting the neck of his noble and sagacious horse, while the moonlight fell in a flood of silver radiance about him, Claude Duval at that moment, on Hampstead Heath, looked something more than mortal.

The chimes preceeding the striking of ten o'clock from the old steeple of Hampstead Church, came gently and musically upon the night air.

"Ah!" said Duval; "so late. There will be few visitors upon the old Heath to-night."

He took from his pocket the Duke's watch, and glancing at it saw the hour.

Even as he did so, a harsh grating sound came upon his ears, accompanied by the cracking of a whip; and he felt confident that some vehicle was crossing the Heath.

"More sport!" cried Duval, as he leaped Nightshade over several clumps of furze-bushes which impeded his view of one of the lower roads that wound in a sinuous fashion amid the sandy knolls and prominences of the common.

A coach, drawn by four horses, and driven by a couple of postillions, was slowly making its way forward.

The heavy vehicle swayed from side to side as sometimes one wheel, and sometimes another, sunk deep down in the soft sand of the Heath.

"This looks promising," said Duval. "Ah! they come to a stand-still. The postillions whip the horses—the wheels are in a deep ruck! By Jove! there they go!"

The heavy coach slowly swayed to one side, and then went over with a crash.

"Forward, Nightshade—forward! Here is more adventure than we looked for!"

A succession of leaps and scramblings over furze-bushes and up sand-heaps, brought Duval to the side of the vehicle.

A sharp, shrill scream from its interior betokened a feminine presence there; and some hoarse cries, in more masculine tones, warned Duval that it was not a lady alone to whose rescue he had proceeded.

The carriage-lamp, on the side where it had fallen, was crushed on the sand; but the other cast a brilliant light about it, which was all the more necessary on that spot, inasmuch as, bright as were the moonbeams generally over the Heath, a clump of tall Norway pine trees cast a broad shadow over that spot.

"Help! help!"

"Murder!"

"Where are we now?—where are we now!"

"Postillions, you shall smart for this!"

"Zounds, sir! how could I help it? The old Heath's full of holes and corners!"

"Help! help!"

"Permit me," said Claude Duval, as he wrenched open the door of the coach that was uppermost, and assisted in the extrication of a lady from the prostrate vehicle.

"Oh, save me—save me!" she cried; "I am shaken to death! Was ever anything so unfortunate, and so indelicate, too! I declare I was thrown right into the arms of the Major, and I prefer yours vastly!"

As the lady spoke, she clung round the neck of Claude Duval with a pertinacity he found it impossible to resist.

A shout was then raised by both the postillions.

One of them seized Nightshade by the bridle.

The other clutched Duval round the waist.

And, scrambling from the interior of the coach, so that his head and arms were clear of the open doorway, a man appeared with a pistol in each hand, which he presented full in the face of Claude Duval.

"You are my prisoner!" he yelled. "You are my prisoner! And it is a choice of death or Newgate! Come out, Mr. Pendell—come out!—we have him! Ha, ha, ha! Claude Duval captured at last! Come out, Mr. Pendell, and bear witness that I am entitled to the thousand pounds reward! Hold on, my men—hold on—he's a slippery customer, but I think we have him now."

"So, so!" said Duval; "that's you, Mr. Muckles!"

"It is, and resistance is death!"

"Do you think me a fool, Mr. Muckles? Cannot you nab a fellow without making all this fuss about it?"

"You give in, then, Claude Duval?"

"Certainly not—but I am taken in! And whom may this lady be who clings round my neck with such affection?"

"Ha, ha! It's not a lady at all. It's young Jem Sharples, the Governor's son at Newgate."

"Oh, indeed!"

"He's a lively youth, ain't he, Claude Duval?"

"Very!"

The lively youth uttered such a succession of roaring yells at this moment, that the Heath echoed with them.

Duval with his right hand had made a clutch at the feminine head-dress

that he wore, and wrenched it off, taking with it a fair handful of the lively youth's hair by the roots.

The operation was almost as bad as being scalped.

"What's the matter?" said Duval.

"Oh!—oh!—oh! Murder!—murder!"

"Nonsense—nonsense! You showed me your way of playing an affectionate part, and that is mine! Now, Mr. Muckles, what's your pleasure?"

"Newgate!" roared Muckles.

"Well, I am not deaf! If Newgate it must be, Newgate be it."

"Now, look you, Claude Duval—here are five of us!"

"Oh, I see! One—two—three—four—five!"

"And upon the slightest attempt to escape, we shall be quite justified in shooting you!"

"Exactly! I await your pleasure, Mr. Muckles."

"Dismount!"

"Precisely—precisely!"

Duval dismounted with such celerity, that in swinging his leg over Nightshade's back he caught the man who held him by the bridle so terrible a blow about the region of the jaw with his heel, that Nightshade was instantly liberated, while the man roared with pain.

"Off, and away!" cried Duval. "Off, Nightshade, off!"

The horse did not require a second order, but gathering itself up for a terrible spring, it fairly cleared the prostrate coach, and, in three seconds, disappeared over the Heath.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL ESCAPES FROM THE OFFICERS.

"FIRE!" shouted Muckles. "Shoot the horse! There's not its equal in all England; but don't let it escape! Fire—fire! I have it—it's a long shot, but a true one!"

"Not yet!" said Duval, as, by a sudden movement, he flung up the arm of the officer, and the pistol was harmlessly discharged in the air. "Not yet! My horse is not a highwayman, whatever I may be!"

"You have foiled me," said Muckles, "and I'm glad of it; because I intend that horse for myself, and I might have killed it with a hasty shot."

Muckles himself, with a couple of his men, kept so close to Claude Duval, that escape, unless some better opportunity should present itself, was quite out of the question.

With a great deal of difficulty, the coach was righted, and then Muckles, with a mock courtesy, which set very ill upon him, bowed to Claude Duval.

"We mean to treat you as a gentleman," he said, "since you give yourself the airs of one, and you shall actually go to Newgate in your own coach and four!"

"Perhaps," said Duval; "but I would advise you not to make too sure."

"He meditates an escape!" cried Muckles; "and I would have you all look to it, my men. You will not do such another night's work as this in a hurry; and if Claude Duval is not lodged in Newgate, we shall be the contempt of the profession!"

"Slip the bracelets on him!" growled one of the men.

"Hold!" cried Duval. "Mr. Muckles, you know me, and I know you. If you attempt to put your bracelets, as you call them, upon me, I will make a solemn determination that, if I live, I will take the first opportunity of

blowing your brains out; while, if I die, and if it be permitted for the spirits of another world to haunt this, I will make your life a burden to you and you shall know no peace!"

"Let him alone," said Muckles. "We are enough of us to guard him well. Let him alone, and put him into the coach."

Claude Duval was hustled into the vehicle, and Mr. Muckles, with one of his myrmidons, rode inside with him.

The two postillions mounted their horses, and the young man who had played the part of the distressed female rode outside.

Did Claude Duval despair under these circumstances?

Certainly not.

He had made a resolution, and before the coach was well clear of Hampstead Heath, he proceeded to carry it into execution.

"Mr. Muckles," he said, "you are not alone, or I might have something to say to you more interesting than even your thoughts of the thousand pounds offered as a reward for my capture."

Muckles looked uneasy.

"You would try to bribe me, Duval," he said; "but it won't do; your time has come!"

"I think not; but since you are so incorruptible, I tell you once and for all you are like a man who has fortune in his grasp, and casts it from him for a toy."

Perhaps Mr. Muckles, had he been really alone with Claude Duval, would have listened with more interest to what he had to say; but he was compelled to assume a kind of heroic virtue, which, in good truth, he was far from feeling, in consequence of the presence of his brother constable in the coach.

"I tells you what it is, Mr. Muckles," growled this man; "I feels uneasy."

"May we venture to inquire what about?" asked Duval.

"About you."

"Me? Is that possible? Why, my good friend, except the natural uneasiness about his own ugliness, that a fellow like you is likely to feel, I do not see any cause for your mental perturbation."

"I ain't good at fine words," answered the constable, "but I tells you what it is, Mr. Muckles, Claude Duval will play upon you some slippery trick yet before you get him to London, and I advise that you put the bracelets on him at once."

"I will—I must, and will!" cried Muckles; "unless, Duval, you will give me your word of honour as a gentleman not to escape."

"I give you my word of honour," said Claude, emphatically, "that I will not make the slightest attempt to escape."

"Then I am satisfied; so hold your tongue, Swallow."

"Well, Mr. Muckles, if you're pleased, I am."

"We are all delighted," said Duval. "I do not see how we could be otherwise in the sweet society of a Swallow. I have objected, Mr. Muckles, to your iron bracelets, but perhaps you are not aware that the handcuffs were never yet forged that could keep my wrists together, if I chose to release them."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed, and in truth! It was a trick taught me by a blacksmith at York."

"A trick worth knowing," said Muckles.

"Well worth knowing, both for and against; and since you have behaved with some courtesy this night, I will show it to you. Come, beautiful Swallow, out with the darbies, for I have heard them clanking in your pocket!"

"He's up to some game, I knows!" growled Swallow; "and I wouldn't be showed any of his tricks!"

"Why, you suspicious dog," cried Duval, "have I not given my word of honour not to make the slightest attempt at escape?"

"He has—he has!" said Muckles; "and that is sufficient."

Swallow, still grumbling in an undertone to himself, produced the handcuffs.

"Now, you would fancy," said Duval, as with a quick movement he took the iron manacles from the hand of Swallow,—“you would fancy that when once these were locked round a man's wrist, no effort of his own could escape them.”

"I feel pretty sure of that," replied Muckles.

"And I am quite sure of it," growled Swallow.

"Yet," said Duval, "I shall be able to show you both how even I, Claude Duval, can get clear of these steel bracelets. It is as pretty a trick as ever was shown. Hold up your hands, Swallow."

"Me?"

"Yes, to be sure!—who else?"

"I thought you was to put 'em on yourself, and show us how you could wriggle out of 'em."

"Why, you stupid, Swallow, that is not worth the seeing; I want to show Mr. Muckles how to do it."

"Oh!"

"Don't be an idiot, Swallow. Hold up your hands, and let Claude Duval show us the trick. It may be worth the knowing some day."

"To be sure it will," said Duval. "All useful knowledge is sure to come in, if we do but live long enough."

Swallow was still reluctant to be the subject of the experiment; but, in obedience to his chief, he held up his great coarse hands, and placed the wrists together.

"Now, you see," said Claude Duval, as with great dexterity and delicacy of touch he fastened the handcuffs on the wrists of Swallow,—“now, you see, my friend Muckle, that this great ugly fellow is properly secured, and, before we go any farther, I would just ask him if he can get out of that without assistance.”

"How should I?" growled Swallow. "The're the strongest pair we have, and a trifle too small for me beside!"

"Good!" said Duval. "Now, under ordinary circumstances, Muckles, your key would be required to release Swallow."

"It would."

"Well, now for the conclusion of the trick. You sit there, and I sit here; Swallow is properly handcuffed and helpless; and if you, by word, cry, or movement, attempt to give the least alarm, I will scatter your brains about the lining of the coach, and your little career will come to an untimely end!"

As he spoke, Duval had plunged his hand into a breast pocket, and produced a small, double-barrelled pistol, which he held in close proximity to the eyes of the astonished and bewildered Muckles.

"I knowed it—I knowed it!" cried Swallow,—“I knowed he was up to some game of the sort!”

"I will trouble you to be quiet, ugly," added Duval. "You must perceive, with half an eye, that the pistol has two barrels; and if I accommodate Mr. Muckles with the contents of one, the other will be quite at your service."

"Done brown!" said Swallow.

"Not quite!" exclaimed Muckles.

During the last half-minute he had furtively plunged his hand into one of his capacious coat pockets, from which he now drew a pistol, and clashing its barrel across that of the weapon which Claude Duval presented at his head, he spoke in a tone of triumph.

"Blaze away!—blaze away! and if brains are to be scattered about, there'll be two lots of them!"

"Muckles," said Duval, "you are a brave fellow, and I have more respect for you now than ever I had before!"

"Blaze away, Duval!—blaze away, if it must be so!"

"Certainly not; it would be unfair."

"What do you mean?"

"You forget."

"Forget what?"

"That is the pistol you fired a short time since at my horse, and you have not had time to reload it."

Muckles dropped his hand, and let the pistol fall to the floor of the coach.

"Done brown again!" said Swallow. "I knowed it! It was sure and sartin! Done brown again!"

"Claude Duval," said Muckles, "you gave your word of honour that you would not make the slightest attempt to escape."

"Nor do I mean," said Duval.

"Ah!"

"Stop; don't call out till you hear what I have to say. I shall keep my word to the letter: I shall not make the *slightest* attempt to escape, which, in my situation would be perfectly ridiculous, since I mean to escape actually."

"Done brown again!" said Swallow.

Muckles bit his lips till the blood came.

"Good night!"

He reached his hand from one of the coach windows and opened the door; and, before the bewildered Muckles could decide upon any course of action, Duval leaped out from the vehicle, and sped over the moonlit Heath like a shadow.

"After him—after him!" shouted Muckles. "I will lose my head yet on Hampstead Heath, before I will lose Claude Duval! After him, I tell you! I will and must have him! Drive on—drive on! You may surely now see him speeding across the Heath!"

The two officers who played the part of postillions had only begun to suspect that something was amiss when the carriage door was opened, and Claude Duval leaped out.

They were speedily confirmed in that supposition now by the furious outcries of Muckles.

He dashed down the front window of the coach, and projecting his head out of it in that direction, he roared and yelled to the postillions.

Then making a leap himself from the vehicle, he ran on to the highest bit of ground he could see in the immediate vicinity, and glared about him over the moonlit Heath like some enraged tiger who had just been baulked of a victim.

"There! there!" he shouted. "I see him now!—I see him by yonder clump of trees! This way—this way! Bring the coach round! Follow swiftly! I will lead you the way, and we shall have him again!"

"Hoy! hoy, Mr. Muckles!" shouted Swallow.

"What now?" asked Muckles, impatiently, as he ran by the side of the coach, with his hand on the door-handle.

"Well, Mr. Muckles, I don't think I shall be much use, even if we do overtake him again, while I'm in limbo in this kind of way!"

"What do you mean?"

"The darbies."

"Idiot that you were to get them on! You deserve to wear them for the remainder of your life!"

"Thank you for nothing, Mr. Muckles; but it seems to me, if I wear them

for the remainder of this night, you will have but a poor chance of nabbing Claude Duval!"

Muckles, upon consideration, seemed to be of the same opinion, for he called to the postillions to stop; and then, as Swallow projected his manacled hands out of the coach window, Muckles, with his key, released him from the handcuffs.

"Ah!" cried Swallow, with a long breath of relief, "I feels all the more comfortable now!"

"Hush! hush! Not a word, on your life!"

"Eh?"

"Be quiet, Swallow—be quiet! Make way for me! No, on second thoughts, I won't get into the coach! Look there!—what does that mean?"

"What—what, Mr. Muckles?"

"There, to the right, just coming out from among the trees! Is Claude Duval mad, or does he think himself a match for us all, now that he is mounted on his horse Nightshade?"

Into a broad patch of moonlight, from amid the deep shadow of a clump of trees on the Heath, there emerged a mounted figure.

Its identity could not be doubted for an instant.

No horse could look like Nightshade.

No rider could surely look like Claude Duval.

The costume, too, was exact.

The crimson velvet coat, with its rich gold facings.

The tall boots, with their silver spurs.

The hat, looped with its jewel.

Yes, that this was Claude Duval, even as he had been in that coach with him and Swallow, Muckles had not the shadow of a doubt.

Moreover, he knew every point of Nightshade, for had he not had every opportunity of feasting his envious eyes upon the rare proportions of that gallant steed, on the occasion of the interrupted execution of Lucy Everton.

"Halt, halt!" cried Muckles, in subdued tones, to the postillions. "He is coming this way. Let us see what he is about."

The coach stopped.

"Look, Swallow—look!"

"I sees him, Mr. Muckles."

"Who is it?"

"Why, our customer, of course—Claude Duval."

Muckles seemed to want this confirmation of the evidence of his own senses, and having received it, he at once dodged round the coach, and began, in a flurried sort of way, to reload the only pistol he possessed, the empty condition of which had placed him so much at the mercy of Claude Duval.

The gallant-looking horseman who had emerged from the wood approached the coach at a swinging trot.

"Well," growled Swallow, "we've been done brown, but he seems as if he wanted to be done browner still!"

"Hush!" said Muckles. "Not another word! Let him come on!"

The horseman reached the side of the coach.

"Hilloa!" he said. "Who are you, and whither are you bound?"

No one answered.

"Are you all deaf, or struck dumb by some amazement? Answer me! Have you seen anything happen on the Heath? That—that in which, I mean, some one's liberty has been concerned?"

"Rather!" shouted Muckles.

At the same moment, he fired his pistol right at the head of the horseman.

The graceful-looking hat flew off, but no further injury seemed to be done.

Before, however, the supposed Claude Duval could make a movement in self-defence, Mr. Swallow, from the coach, perpetrated rather a clever manoeuvre.

Leaning out as far as he could from the window, he caught the bridle of Nightshade, shouting, as he did so, "I have him, Mr. Muckles—I have him! Hurrah! It's all right now!"

It was not quite all right, though, for Nightshade backed, and Swallow came through the window of the coach like a harlequin, only the movement was not entirely by his own consent.

At the same moment, the rider of Nightshade rapidly dismounted, although the object of that movement seemed quite inadequate to its importance.

It was only for the purpose of picking up the hat, which had been struck from his head by the bullet of Muckles.

By this time, both the postillions had flung themselves from their horses; and both Muckles and Swallow, surprised at the whole occurrence, threw themselves bodily upon him whom they supposed to be Claude Duval.

"Nabbed at last!—nabbed at last!" shouted Muckles.

"It looks like it," said Swallow, "unless we're done brown in some sort of way."

"You mistake," said the horseman in the crimson velvet coat. "I know not for what or whom you take me, since my errand here is merely to seek information if you have a prisoner, or know of any party of officers who have taken a prisoner on the Heath to-night."

"He's a *haltering* of his voice," said Swallow; "but it's Claude Duval, for all that."

CHAPTER IX.

CLAUDE DUVAL TAKES AN ANXIOUS LOOK INTO NEWGATE.

By this time, the dismounted horseman had looked into the coach, and saw that it was vacant.

"I am answered," he said: "I need trouble you no longer. I am not Claude Duval."

"And this, perhaps, is not his horse Nightshade?" said Muckles. "Ha, ha! We shall see! If you are not Claude Duval, there are two of you, and either one is a good nab for one night's work! The darbies, Swallow—the darbies! We'll try them on him this time!"

The horseman in the crimson velvet coat now seemed to be fully aware of his danger.

"No, no," he cried; "this must not be! It were well to exchange life for life, but an aimless capture must not—shall not be! Hold off, I say! I am not so helpless as I look!"

By a sudden effort, the horseman freed himself from the grasp of the officers about him, and retreating step by step, presented a couple of pistols full in their faces.

The two postillions shrunk back.

Even Swallow and Muckles hesitated to advance in face of such imminent danger.

It was possible that this mysterious personage might have escaped, had it not been that across the Heath, at this moment, there came a party of five or six mounted men.

"Help! help! I call upon you in the King's name!" shouted Muckles.
"Help! help! A highwayman—a highwayman!"

The party of horsemen paused.

"In the King's name!" cried Muckles; "and you will have a portion of the reward!"

These last words seemed to turn the scale completely in his favour, as regarded the feelings of the mounted men on this occasion.

As they came dashing up towards the spot, they showed themselves to be post-boys, as they were called, although men in age.

Their routes, after leaving London, lay in different directions, but it was quite common for them to pass over Hampstead Heath in a body, for mutual protection.

"Blaze away, now!" cried Swallow. "You can't do much harm!"

Bang! bang! went both the pistols of the supposed Claude Duval.

One bullet went through the panel of the coach.

The other, after striking one of the lamp-irons, diverged to the roof, through which it actually passed, and wounded the lively youth who had played the part of the distressed female on Duval's first apprehension.

The yell of pain and dismay that he uttered seemed for the instant to confound the gentleman in the crimson velvet coat.

The moment of hesitation was fatal.

The post-boys were on the spot.

Muckles threw himself forward again, and grasped the stranger by the arm.

"You are my prisoner, Claude Duval!" he cried. "You have given us some trouble to-night, but you shall give us no more!"

"Claude Duval!" cried the post-boys,— "is this Claude Duval?"

"Ah, to be sure!" said Swallow; "and he's done brown at last!"

The post-boys raised a cheer, for more than once, Duval, to their great personal terror, had eased individuals of their party of the mail-bags; and his very name was a something that made their blood run cold to think of.

"In with you, Duval, in with you!" said Muckles, as he held the coach door open. "In with you; for after all, you shall sleep in Newgate to-night."

"The darbies?" said Swallow. "There you are! Don't they go on comfortably? And now you can show us the nick of getting them off if you can."

The prisoner was hustled into the coach.

Once, and once only, he raised a cry.

"Help, Claude, help!"

What could it mean?

Nightshade was with difficulty yoked to one of the leading horses of the coach.

"Forward!" shouted Muckles. This is the best night's work ever was done on old Hampstead Heath. Forward, all of you, to Newgate! To Newgate!"

"No!" said the prisoner; "hold yet a moment—you know not what you do. Now who am I?"

"We know quite well enough you are Claude Duval, the ladies' highwayman. But as we don't happen to belong to the fair sex, why, you see, we have neither pity nor commiseration for you."

"You make a great mistake," said the prisoner, "and if I convince you that I am not Claude Duval, you have no warrant or right to apprehend me."

"Not the least! Ha, ha!—not the least!" said muckles; "and if you do succeed in proving that to me, I'll let you go at once."

"Let me think—let me think!"

The prisoner pressed his hands for a moment over his face.

"Pshaw!" cried Muckles ; "you can't think yourself out of your name. Drive on, postillions! To Newgate—to Newgate!"

"Be it so," said the prisoner ; "it is better."

He shrunk back into a corner of the coach, and with both his manacled hands pulled his hat lower still upon his brow.

In something under three-quarters of an hour the coach halted at the grim portal of Newgate.

"Look to him, Swallow, look to him!" said Muckles, with an air of exultation. "I must see the Governor, and get a proper receipt, or we may miss our reward."

The arrival of the vehicle at that time of the night, coming at such a pace and halting at the gate of Newgate, produced rather a sensation in the hall of the prison.

The wardens on duty crowded to the wicket with curious faces.

"Who is it, Muckles—who is it? What's the game?"

"Claude Duval!"

The name had quite a magical effect.

A cheer arose from every throat.

It was the first time the redoubtable highwayman had ever been fairly brought across the threshold of the prison.

The wardens made a kind of lane for him to pass through ; and with their peculiar views of criminality, they paid the prisoner quite as much attention and respect as they would have accorded to the monarch himself had he chosen to visit Newgate.

"Welcome, welcome, Claude Duval! Welcome to the old Stone Jug! You're the sort of customer we like, for you're sure to come on a high horse."

Come on a high horse to Newgate meant with a pocketful of money.

And this was a period when money purchased anything in the great metropolitan prison, even to escape from the gloomiest cells, for the most hardened malefactor.

Muckles kept a good clutch upon his prisoner's sleeve, as the short flight of steps were ascended that led to the vestibule of the prison.

Swallow held him by the skirt of the coat as he followed.

And so the party found their way within the walls of Newgate.

The Governor's night-bell had been rung, and that individual, in his dressing-gown, made his appearance.

"Claude Duval, if you please, Mr. Governor," said Muckles, with an air of exultation.

"Ah, indeed, Mr. Muckles! A most important capture. I think his Majesty's Government offers a thousand pounds reward."

"Just so, sir."

"Then you and your companions have made a good night's work of it. Well, Duval, we will contrive to find you a lodging in old Newgate."

"On what charge?" said the prisoner.

"Oh, only highway robbery! I fancy you will have to take your trial for stopping his Royal Highness Frederick Prince of Wales close to Kew Garden and stealing from him eight hundred guineas. I rather think, Mr. Duval, that will be sufficient for your business."

"I know not," said the prisoner, "why you call me Mr. Duval. I certainly have heard that name—since who has not? My wrists are manacled and it is with difficulty I can lift off my hat, but——"

"Don't trouble yourself," said the Governor ; "we will do it for you."

He lifted off the prisoner's hat.

There was a moment's pause, and then from a dense mass in which it had

been gathered on the top of the prisoner's head, there fell on to the neck and shoulders of the supposed Claude Duval a quantity of fair and beautiful hair.

The condition of the rednudent locks was certainly confused and disordered, but there was no mistaking the feminine character of them, nor of the face they surrounded.

The Governor stepped back aghast.

Muckles fell with a groan into the arms of a gigantic turnkey who happened to be behind him.

"Done brown again!" shouted Swallow.

The effect upon the wardens of Newgate was rather peculiar.

The vestibule of the prison resounded with whistling, since it was by long-drawn sounds of that description that the majority of them chose to testify their astonishment.

"You see," added the prisoner, "that I am not Claude Duval!"

"Then who," cried the Governor, "in the name of all that's—hem!—are you?"

"That is my business," said the prisoner, as she—for we must now call this representative of Claude Duval by the feminine pronoun—lightly stroked the artificial moustache she wore.

"Perhaps you will kindly say," she added, "upon what pretence I—whom none of you know at all, and who you cannot have any charge against—am detained in Newgate."

"Done brown again!" ejaculated Swallow.

Muckles made a savage blow at him, but Swallow ducked and avoided it, and as Muckles's arm was a long one, the blow fell exactly upon the most prominent feature of the face of the Governor.

A scene of confusion immediately ensued.

The Governor swore roundly, and ordered Muckles into custody.

The turnkeys with difficulty suppressed their laughter, and the representative of Claude Duval, whom we may as well call by her right name, Lucy Everton, slowly made her way to the wicket gate.

"Stop her, stop her!" cried Muckles. "I don't know who she is, but I charge her with obstructing me in my duty, and in aiding and assisting the escape of a felon."

"This is strange," said Lucy. "I doubt if there be another officer in the police of all England who would condescend to charge a girl with obstructing him in his duty, with five companions at his heels."

"That's all very well," replied Muckles; "but I charge her, and will hold to it."

"And I fancy," said one of the turnkeys, "that I have seen her somewhere before."

A faint flush came over the face of Lucy.

This was all she dreaded.

Her detection as the Lucy Everton who had been taken out to die, and had been so gallantly rescued by Claude Duval.

"And I, too," said another of the turnkeys. "I am certain I have seen her somewhere."

A lantern was held up so as to cast its full rays upon the face of the young girl.

She stood the scrutiny well.

And there were many reasons why she should not be recognised.

The male costume she wore, in the first place, made her look not nearly so tall as when in her own proper feminine dress.

Her hair—although its colour could not be concealed—hung about her face and neck totally different from that in which it had been worn by the Lucy Everton they knew.

The false moustache likewise that graced her upper lip gave quite a different expression to the face.

The turnkeys gazed at her for some time in silence.

Then they shook their heads.

"I've seen her somewhere."

"So have I."

"And I too."

"Where?" cried the Governor. "Are you all idiots? Where have you all seen her?"

No one could answer that question.

A slight smile crossed the lips of Lucy Everton.

It was a smile of triumph.

She had passed successfully through the dangerous ordeal to which she had been subjected.

It was a smile of exquisite beauty, and lighted up the fair face like a gleam of bright sunshine.

But what means the sudden change?

The parted lips.

The blanched cheek.

The look of dismay.

"Fly—fly!" she shrieked. "Fly, and leave me! I am not in danger! Fly, Claude, fly!"

Over the wicket gate of Newgate, from the steps beyond, gazed a pair of anxious eyes, that belonged to a face flushed with heat and excitement.

The face and the eyes were Claude Duval's.

CHAPTER X.

CLAUDE DUVAL SACRIFICES ALL FOR LOVE, AND YET SAVES HIMSELF.

"AWAY, away!" shrieked Lucy once more, and then she had no longer the power of utterance.

A choking sensation came over her.

She could only point to the face that peeped over the wicket gate of Newgate.

And that face did not disappear.

Its owner would not fly, although thus adjured to do so.

What had Claude done, then, that he should fly instantly upon sight of her to whom he had surrendered up his whole heart of love.

No, no! A thousand times, no!

He rapped at the wicket gate.

Then Lucy, in her despair, found breath to speak again. Her voice was hoarse and all unlike its ordinary tones; and still she counselled flight.

"Fly—fly! Save yourself! Let not all this terror—all this anxiety—all this danger be in vain! Fly! if you love me!"

The appearance of Claude Duval at the wicket-gate—the terrified, agonized expression of Lucy's fear—the cries of despair with which she counselled him to save himself—all occupied not a tithe of the time they have taken in the recording.

The eyes of all the officers and wardens were directed to the wicket.

A suspicion seized Mr. Muckles of the truth.

He flew to "the lock," as it was technically called, and threw the little barrier open.

"Lost—lost!" shrieked Lucy. "Oh, this is cruel—cruel—too cruel!"

Claude Duval stepped into the the vestibule of Newgate.

He, too, was attired in a crimson velvet coat—he, too, had tall horseman's boots with silver spurs, and his hat was likewise looped with a diamond.

Alas, poor Lucy!

It was the arrival of Nightshade without its rider at the haunted house on Hampstead Head which had convinced her that some great danger was hovering about Claude Duval, or some calamity had actually fallen upon him.

And, from his wardrobe in the suite of rooms to which he had directed her, she had easily found an exact counterpart of the dress he wore.

Gratitude, love, devotion nerved her with power of purpose and strength of action.

She had sallied forth on the Heath to save him, and we have seen what has come of the perilous adventure.

And now Muckles knew his man.

With a yell of triumph he rushed forward, and cast his arms around Duval.

"Again I have him! Again I have him!" he cried. "This is the true Claude Duval! Close the wicket—close the wicket! Ha, ha! It's a good night's work yet!"

"Claude—Claude!" cried Lucy; "is this kind?"

"It is right!" said Duval. "Gentlemen all, I perceive there has been some mistake here. In this young lady you thought you had captured Claude Duval. Look at me, and choose which you will have as the prisoner of that name, so that you liberate the other."

"Claude Duval! Claude Duval!" was the universal cry among the turnkeys and warders of Newgate. "This is Claude Duval!"

They crowded about him.

"If you please, gentlemen," said Duval, "give me room to breathe; and, at the same time, give this young lady space to leave Newgate."

"No, no!" cried Lucy. "For you, or with you!"

"Hush!" said Duval; "do not unman me. Go while you may—and be assured I am with you still!"

"With me still!"

"Yes, the better part of me—all my heart and all my love!"

"I cannot—I cannot!" cried Lucy, as she wrung her hands. "Oh, what a night is this! How foolish I have been?"

"Hush!"

"Claude—Claude, I did it for the best!"

"And the best is ever well done. Go—go!"

"But how mistaken have I been! You cannot—you never will forgive me!"

"I don't feel quite certain," said the Governor of Newgate, "that this person who has been masquerading as Claude Duval ought to be let go so easily."

"Be content, Mr. Governor," said Duval; "it is not often such a night's work as this will come into Newgate. Clear the way, and let her go at once. You cannot have a charge against her."

"And you stay?" said Lucy.

"Oh, I am Claude Duval!"

"And you exchange yourself for me?"

"As you tried to do for me?"

Lucy clasped her hands.

"It is not too late—it is not too late! The law wants a victim—let it have one—and one at a time. I am——"

"Silence!" cried Duval.

"I am——"

"I command you!"

Lucy dropped her hands.

Claude imperiously waved his hand to the wicket gate.

"Go!"

"I obey."

She turned and looked at him.

He made two steps towards her.

With a cry, she sprang into his arms.

Another moment, and she was gone—gone into the night air—disappearing before the astonished eyes of the warders before they could well comprehend the nature of the scene, with all its doubts, its fears, its wild emotions, and its unbounded affections, that had taken place about them.

It was Muckles who then rushed towards the wicket with a shout, as a new idea struck him.

"Two birds!" he cried. "Two birds with one stone; and both killed—ha, ha! I know her now! By all the bolts and bars of old Newgate, it's Lucy Everton!"

"Lucy Everton?" cried the warders in chorus.

Claude Duval was just in time to catch Muckles by the back of the neck, and flung him with tremendous force to the other end of the vestibule.

"Peace!" he cried. "A prudent man never pushes his triumph too far. Be content all of you. I am Claude Duval, and the roof of Newgate is over my head!"

"Done brown again!" said Swallow.

Muckles sat up upon the cold stone floor, looking bewildered by his fall.

"I'll see him hanged!" he said; "and that's one comfort; and I shall have he thousand pounds reward!"

"Oh, dear, no!" said Duval.

"No!"

"Certainly not! The thousand pounds reward is for the capture of Claude Duval!"

"And here you are!" shrieked Muckles, as he made a rush towards Claude upon his hands and knees.

"Yes; here I am, that is perfectly true; but *I gave myself up!*"

* * * * *

In ten minutes from these last ominous words that fell from his lips, and which had proved the destruction of all the hopes of Mr. Muckles, the constable, Claude Duval was in one of the deepest cells of Newgate.

A narrow habitation.

Six feet wide, and twelve in length.

The walls cold and slimy with damp.

The floor only of beaten earth, from which exhaled a perpetual noisome atmosphere.

It was Swallow and a couple of the warders of the prison who put Claude into this unsavoury abode.

"There you is: though I don't mind owning we're done brown at last, 'cos we don't get the reward."

"Now, Mr. Duval," said one of the warders; "how do you like this crib?"

"Not at all."

"I thought as how you wouldn't. A gentleman like you, as has spangles in his pocket, ought to have a better lodging; and it's only good enough for a poor devil as don't know the meaning of the word garnish."

"But I do!" said Duval. "Here are twenty guineas. I'm afraid they may get tarnished in Newgate!"

"That's your sort!" said the warder.

"It's halves, Billy—it's halves!" said Swallow.

"Not at all—you be a Bow-street runner; and we warders of Newgate always divides the garnish among us!"

"Done brown again!" said Swallow.

"Come on, Mr. Duval," added the warder. "I dare say we shall be able to find a better lodging than this for you in the Stone Jug."

"Stop a bit!" said Claude; "it may reconcile some poor devil who has no money in his pocket to this cell, if he thinks it was once occupied by Claude Duval. Lend me one of your big keys!"

"What for?"

Claude laughed.

"I mean to leave my mark behind me."

Curiosity induced the turnkey to lend him the key.

Upon the soft stone of the side of the cell, which many years of damp had disintegrated, the celebrated prisoner wrote, as he chanted, the following four lines:—

"When Claude Duval was in Newgate thrown,
He carved his name on the Newgate stone;
And when in the morning for me they call,
'I'll have vanished away,' said Claude Duval."

The turnkey rubbed his head.

"Well!" he said; "I've seen no end of poetry in my time—copies of verses—last dying speeches—confessions, and such like things; but I never did read anything half so clever as that—and all out of his own head, too!"

"Don't be a fool!" growled Swallow. "Don't you hear he's a going to wanish!"

"Well, and if he does? A man as can write such poetry as that, has a right to vanish!"

"We shall all be done brown," said Swallow, "as sure as eggs and Barcelony nuts!"

The warders were men of their word, and Duval found himself in a rather comfortably-furnished apartment, which, although the walls were of stone, was palatial in comparison to the cell he had just left.

"Pay me a visit," whispered Claude to Swallow, as he passed him, "and I'll tell you where some of my swag lies hidden on Hampstead Heath."

"You will?"

"I swear it!"

"Then I don't feel half so done brown as I was!"

In about half an hour after Claude had been in his new cell, a key was cautiously turned in the lock of the door.

The gleam of a lantern shot into the place.

"It's me!" said Swallow.

"Come in!"

"All right, Muster Duval! You see, it's very different with a poor fellow like me and Muster Muckles. He does things in a wicious sort of way; but when I'm done brown, I owns to it, and there's an end of it! You're sure to be hanged, which, in course, you knows as well as I can tell you; so it won't do you no harm to ease your mind about any swag you've got hid about in holes and corners!"

"That's what I thought," said Claude; "and as you seem an honest sort of fellow——"

"Oh, wery—wery!"

"I made up my mind to tell you. Ah, me!—ah, me! My heart is heavy about poor Nightshade!"

"About who?"

"My horse!"

"Oh, he's all right! He's at the inn opposite, and I daresay is making himself comfortable!"

"I rejoice to hear it; and yet I fear that some rascal, envying his speed and noble qualities, will take him away, and perhaps ill-use him!"

"They can't! He won't be given up unless somebody goes over with a red waistcoat and a constable's staff to fetch him!"

"A red waistcoat?"

"Yes; like mine."

"And a staff?"

"To be sure! This sort of thing."

"Oh, ah! I see now."

"Well, now, Muster Duval, about the swag?"

"Hush!"

"Eh?"

"Hist!"

"Whist!"

"I thought I heard some one!"

"It couldn't be! There isn't a soul near us, by ever so far; and leave me alone for a bit of management. We may speak up, for nobody can hear us. Bless your heart, Joskins, the head warder, has had his second pint of purl, and is fast asleep, with his hand on the lock."

"But you don't want to stay in Newgate all night?"

"Not I! He'll let me out when he sees my red waistcoat and top-coat, and I calls out the right word, which is 'Keys.'"

"And you are quite sure no one is within hearing?"

"Quite, Muster Duval!"

"Then," said Claude, "I am perfectly astonished that you should venture here, thinking me such an intolerable fool as not to take you by the throat, and dash your brains out against that stone wall!"

"Murder! murder! Mur—mur——"

"Silence! or you are a dead man!"

Swallow lay at the feet of Duval, having reached the ground with a force that nearly deprived him of consciousness.

"It may be," said Duval, "that there is no one within hearing, but I will have no outcry! Your life is in your own hands, because it is in mine! Decide! Shall it be death or submission?"

Claude put his foot upon the breast of the officer.

"Done brown again!" said Swallow. "I ought to have knowed it!"

"You would have known it, but you were blinded by your cupidity!"

"My what?"

"Pshaw! I waste words upon you!"

Claude stooped, and a short rummage in the pocket of Swallow produced a stout cord, with which Duval managed to pinion him in such a fashion that he was quite helpless.

"Stay!" said Duval, when he had accomplished this, on the spur of the moment. "I had quite forgotten. I must have the red waistcoat."

Swallow was effectually subdued, and made not the least resistance while Duval denuded him of the red waistcoat, the broad-skirted top-coat, and a rather gandy cravat he wore, as well as of his top-boots.

"Now, Mr. Swallow," said Duval, "for your own sake, I shall properly secure you! It will be nothing against you that you were scarcely a match for Claude Duval! And as for the reason that brought you here, you must find one for yourself!"

"It's shabby," said Swallow—"it's shabby!"

"What is?"

"You said—you swore you'd tell me where the swag was."

"And so I will!"

"Oh!"

"You will go to Hampstead Heath, and, walking eighty steps, exactly to the north from the stone which records the murder of Colonel Richards, you will come to an ancient sycamore tree. Climb it, and you will find, at some fifty feet from the earth, that the stem is hollow, like the shaft of a chimney."

"That'll do!" said Swallow. "I ain't a going down. I'm done brown again!"

"And if you were to go down," added Duval, "you would find nothing. I promised to tell you where the swag *was*, not where it will be half a dozen hours hence!"

"Browner than ever!" growled Swallow. "I ain't fit to live; so good night to you, Claude Duval!"

CHAPTER XI.

CLAUDE DUVAL DANCES A COTILLION WITH THE MARCHIONESS OF QUEENSBURY.

Duval was a head taller than Swallow.

That made a little difficulty in the way of disguise; but it was not an insurmountable one, especially when we consider that the only light by which he could be seen would be that dimly and artificially cast by the lanterns of the warders in the vestibule of Newgate.

Besides, Duval could stoop a little; and if the man on the lock had indeed taken his second pint of purl, it was not probable that he would be in a good condition to be critical about the accurate particulars of the personal appearance of one who bore the outward semblance of an officer of the police.

Duval took care that the red waistcoat should be prominent enough; and he likewise carried the small staff with the gilt crown at the end of it in his hand.

The usual three warders were lolling upon the wooden benches of the vestibule of Newgate as Duval reached it.

They looked up, but lazily.

The man on the lock was humming a drowsy sort of tune, and, at long intervals between the whiffs, smoking a pipe.

Duval felt that confidence, and an entire absence of all hesitation, would be the principal elements of success; and striving to imitate, as well as he could, the thick, growling voice of Swallow, he cried out, "Keys! keys!"

"Well, you needn't make such a row!" said the man on the lock.

"All right!" cried Duval.

"Ah, yes; it's all right to you that's going out of the blessed Jug, but it's all one to us poor warders as if we was put in for cracking a crib, or crying, 'Stand and deliver!' on the highway!"

"I'll send you in another drop of purl!" said Duval.

"Will you, though? All's right—be quick!"

Click! went the key in the lock, and the wicket gate swung open.

Claude Duval was at liberty.

With what a keen relish he inhaled the first breath of the cool, pleasant night air, burdened even as it was with the exhalations of the Old Bailey and the region of Newgate Market in its immediate vicinity.

Half a dozen strides took him to the opposite side of the way.

Then he glanced over at the grim stone walls of the great prison from which he had just emerged.

"Good-bye to Newgate," he said, "I hope for many a day; and if I am fortunate enough to get possession of Nightshade, all will yet be well!"

Then there was a faint cry.
Some one rushed towards him.
"Claude! Claude!"

A pair of arms was flung about him, and he knew the voice to be that of his own Lucy.

"Here still, Lucy?" he said.

"Where you are, yes, for ever, and for ever!"

"Oh, how imprudent you have been!"

"Blame me—kill me—but let me cling to you still!"

"Cruel Lucy! Wherefore should I blame the true love which begets such heroism? But this is no place for us. Let us hasten to our home, for I long again to hear the night wind among the tall trees on Hampstead Heath!"

"Yes, Claude; let us away—let us away! And although on foot, we shall soon reach our destination!"

"I hope we shall not go on foot. Nightshade, I am credibly informed, occupies a stall in these stables close to us. We will get him out, if it be in the power of mortal man to do so!"

Claude, as he spoke, rung the bell at the entrance of the stable-yard which had been indicated by Swallow.

Again and again, though, he had to ring it before any attention was paid to the summons; and then, as a voice from within called out "Who's there?" in sleepy accents, the great clock of St. Paul's struck the hour of three.

"Open! open!" cried Claude Duval. "I'm an officer from Newgate, and come for the highwayman's horse. Open! open!"

"How do I know that? You may be the highwayman himself."

"Stuff, man—stuff! He's safe enough in the Stone Jug. Open, and be quick about it, or you'll get yourself into trouble!"

The ostler grumblingly opened the gate, and when he saw the well-known red waistcoat, and the little staff of authority, he made no further scruples.

"I'm glad to get rid of the brute!" he said. "He won't eat, and he won't drink. He has given me two kicks, and made one grab at me with his teeth."

Duval laughed.

"Hilloal!" said the ostler; "he seems to know you"

The moment Nightshade was liberated from his stable he trotted up to Duval, and performed a trick which had been taught him, and which consisted in lifting up a fore-foot, and placing it lightly upon the breast of his master.

"He ought to know me," said Claude, as he led Nightshade into the Old Bailey. "Mount, Lucy—mount!"

"Lucy!" said the ostler, as he held up his lantern. "Who's Lucy? Is there two of you?"

"Yes," said Claude, when both he and Lucy were on Nightshade's back, "there are two of us. This is a dear friend of mine, and I am Claude Duval!"

The ostler dropped the lantern.

"Thieves! thieves! Fire! Murder! Fetch the blunderbuss!"

"Good night!" said Duval; "and when next you have a highwayman's horse in your care, you had better look to it more carefully than you have to this one."

Duval gave the rein to Nightshade, and they trotted down the Old Bailey, towards Ludgate Hill.

They still heard the ostler calling out "Thieves!" and "Fire!" and so immediately opposite as he was to the wicket gate of Newgate, it was not possible but that his outcries must create some alarm.

A loud and startling report then came upon the night air.

The ostler had procured the blunderbuss he spoke of, and at a venture fired it off in the direction whence Claude had proceeded.

The only effect of the discharge, however, was nearly to demolish a watchman, who, hearing the uproar, had just turned the corner from Ludgate Hill and began to spring his rattle.

By this time Claude and Lucy were nearly at Temple Bar.

They intended to make their way through Soho towards the North Road, but before they passed St. Mary's Church, in the Strand, a couple of horsemen in rather gaudy liveries dashed by them.

At a short distance further a travelling carriage appeared, of which these two horsemen were the outriders.

The carriage had but two horses, which were ridden by a lad in the dress of a postillion.

"Lucy," whispered Claude, "do you recollect who you are?"

"Who I am, Claude?"

"Yes; the wife of a highwayman; and, as this is the highway, you know, and there is a carriage, is not the inference rather obvious?"

"But, Claude, is it not possible to forsake this mode of life?"

"No, Lucy; I am what I am and ever shall be."

As he spoke, he dashed up to the side of the carriage.

"Halt!" he cried; and the boy postillion, with an appearance of fright, drew up his horses.

Duval stooped from Nightshade, and looked in at the carriage window.

A couple of ladies occupied it.

One was a portly female, wrapped up in a profusion of velvets and furs.

The other was rather a slim young girl, whose principal effort appeared to be in that carriage to give as much room as possible to her portly companion.

"Madam," said Claude, addressing the lady with the furs, "I am in want of some money and jewels for a particular purpose."

"Thieves!"

"No, madam, only one. The gentleman I have with me on my horse is but a spectator. I will trouble you for your watch and purse, and I fancy that must be a diamond necklace I see glittering around your fair neck, although it scarcely adds to your beauty."

"Thieves!" again said the lady, but it was in a very mild, temperate tone of voice.

"And yet, after all," added Duval, "I may be mistaken, for now I look closer, it is so difficult to distinguish the sparkle of the jewels from your bright eyes that no one but a jeweller could detect the difference."

"Thieves!" said the lady again, but it was in a whisper.

"Dear aunt," said the young lady on the opposite side of the carriage, "let us proceed. Oh, pray, let us proceed!"

"Tell me who you are," said the lady with the furs; "although I think I could name you."

Duval smiled.

"And I, madam," he said, "can name you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, you are the Marchioness of Queensbury; but as my time is somewhat precious, I would fain receive from you these little keepsakes I have mentioned and no longer expose myself to destruction in heart and brain from the battery of your charms!"

"Take this purse, and be content," said the Marchioness. "If one is to be robbed on the highway, it is a comfort to be so by a gentleman."

Claude weighed the purse in his hand, and guessed its contents to be valuable.

"Tell me," said the Marchioness—"for I can now name you as Claude Duval,—is it true that on Ealing Common you robbed, and then danced a cotillion with, that odious little baby-faced Duchess of Cleveland?"

"I had that honour."

"Pooh! Honour, indeed!"

"And, madam," added Claude, with a smile, "if your ladyship will alight, I shall have great pleasure in repeating the dance here in the Strand. It is a time in the morning when we shall have but few spectators; a couple of drowsy watchmen, perhaps, or some belated wayfarer who may prop himself against a door, and fancy himself in the midst of a dream of strange import!"

"Oh, aunt, do not think of such a thing!" said the young lady.

"That odious little Cleveland," muttered the Marchioness, "is always telling the story, and getting a gang of men about her to listen to it, because they know she picks out one of them as an illustration, and dances the cotillion with him?"

"Fight her with her own weapons, madam!" said Claude. "Put it in your power to say that you, too, have been stopped on the highway, and forced to dance with Claude Duval!"

"Viewing it in that light," said the Marchioness "and to make her ridiculous, I think ——"

"Aunt! aunt!" expostulated the young lady; "how can you be so absurd?"

"Absurd, Dorinda! Perhaps you would like a box on the ears!"

Claude felt that the frolic must be carried out, and hastily dismounting from Nightshade, he whispered to Lucy, "Fear nothing—fear nothing! These things are part of the reputation of Claude Duval!"

"Good gracious!" cried the Marchioness, "what are you doing?"

Claude began to take off his top-boots, but they were the top-boots of Mr. Swallow, which had been quite sufficiently capacious to be drawn on over his own.

He next flung Swallow's coat on the pavement, and the cravat and waistcoat after it.

"Now, madam," said Duval, "you will recognise better your most humble servant, who sometimes has the enviable distinction of being called the ladies' highwayman!"

"Ah, me!" said the Marchioness. "Alas! it's a sad thing for poor me to be taken out of my coach in the middle of the night to dance with the celebrated Claude Duval! But it can't be helped, I suppose. Dorinda, you stay where you are; and when that odious little Cleveland tells her story again, you can bear witness how Duval would insist upon this cotillion."

"Nay," said Duval, "we will make two couples! My young friend here is a charming dancer. Nightshade, be still!"

Lucy uttered a remonstrance; but Duval, in a rapid whisper, told her it would be safer if she were to engage the Marchioness's niece likewise in the dance.

"Now, Nightshade!" cried Duval.

As he spoke, Claude began nod his head and whistle and stamp with one of his feet.

Nightshade had been taught to imitate these manœuvres, with the exception of the whistling; and keeping pretty regular time, the creature beat with one of its fore-feet upon the roadway, nodding its head, and bending its arched neck, as if to the cadences of a tune.

"This is at once beautiful and astonishing," said the Marchioness, "and beats that odious little Cleveland to nothing!"

The dance began.

The Marchioness's niece was half dragged from the coach, and compelled to take part in the extemporaneous ball.

The boy postilion looked petrified with astonishment; and half a dozen watchmen, who strolled up from different quarters of the neighbourhood,

kept at a respectful distance, holding up their lanterns, and not knowing what to make of it.

"Bravo! bravo!" cried Claude; "your ladyship dances divinely!" With great dexterity, Duval slipped ring after ring from the Marchioness's fingers. He unclasped the necklace from her neck. He took even the earrings from her ears, and every time he committed one of these depredations, the Marchioness uttered a faint scream. Then there came the clatter of horses' feet. The two outriders, missing the carriage from behind them, were returning. "Our cotillion is over," said Claude Duval. "Allow me, madam, to hand you to your carriage."

The two outriders reined in their horses, and looked on the scene with unqualified amazement.

The Marchioness had one foot upon the carriage step, and in three minutes more the strange episode in her history and in that of Claude Duval would have been over.

An interruption, however, took place in the harmony of the proceedings as from the neighbourhood of Temple Bar there came at furious, headlong speed, a mounted man.

"Stop him! stop him! A thousand pounds reward for Claude Duval, the highwayman, dead or alive! dead or alive! Stop him! stop him!"

It was Muckles, the officer.

"Ah!" said Duval, "it seems that we shall have warm work. Mount, Lucy, mount!"

"Oh, this fatal delay!" exclaimed Lucy.

"Do not call it fatal. All will be well."

The two outriders took the alarm.

The shouts and cries of Muckles, and the manner in which he pointed towards Claude Duval, sufficiently opened their eyes to the real facts of the case.

"Halt!" cried Duval. "Mr. Muckles, I have no desire to do you an injury but if you advance another step, you are a dead man."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Muckles. "Ha! ha! You have no pistols, Claude Duval. You will find your horse's holsters empty, and the pair you had with you we took care to ease you of at Newgate. Ha! ha! You have no pistols. Forward, my men, forward! and we shall have him yet, and the thousand pounds reward likewise, for this time he don't give himself up."

"Nor has he any need!" shouted a voice; "for if he has no pistols, I have plenty, and to spare."

From behind the Marchioness of Queensberry's carriage, a man scrambled right up on to the roof, and presented a pair of large horse pistols full in the face of Muckles.

"Blossom!" ejaculated Duval.

"Yes, Captain! I am here, and half a dozen of our fellows are just by the corner of the churchyard yonder."

"Done brown again!" roared a voice; and Swallow, who had run all the way from Newgate without his coat or boots, fell back in a state of despair into a doorway.

"Good night, Mr. Muckles!" cried Claude Duval. "Marchioness, I have the honour of bidding you good night, and wishing you a pleasant journey! Forward, Blossom! Where's your horse?"

"Here, Captain! At the back of the coach."

"Cowards! wretches!" cried Muckles to the two outriders; "we are yet three to two, and here are half a dozen watchmen! Help! Thieves! Highwaymen! Seize them! seize them!"

"Blossom, blow a whistle."

Loudly and shrilly the notes echoed round St. Mary's Church, and from the

narrow thoroughfares at one side of it there emerged seven mounted men.

"The game's up!" muttered Muckles, as he dashed his hat into the roadway.

"Good night again," said Duval; "and now off and away in earnest."

Duval's men gathered around him.

They raised a cheer, which awakened many a deep sleeper in the houses of that part of the Strand, and then at a brisk trot they dashed up a little court at the end of Drury Lane, and disappeared from before the eyes of the bewildered watchmen, outriders, and constables.

CHAPTER XII.

CLAUDE DUVAL HEARS LUCY EVERTON'S STORY FROM HER OWN LIPS.

"TELL me, Claude," said Lucy, as she sat in the ancient bower chamber of the haunted mansion on Hampstead Heath,—“tell me how you came to know me and to love me?”

"I heard your story obscurely," replied Claude, "and I was a partial spectator at your trial."

"Ah, Claude! could I but have guessed such kindly eyes were bent upon me! But you did not believe me guilty?"

"Not for a moment. There was a mystery in the whole transaction, which, although it was past my powers of solution, I felt had a meaning and explanation, if one could come at them. However, Lucy, I made my determination."

"To save me!"

"Yes—having acquitted you in my own heart, I from that moment cared nothing for the verdicts of judges and juries. I determined to save you, and thank heaven, succeeded."

Lucy shuddered. Her thoughts had flown back to that terrible morning when she was conducted to Bloomsbury Fields to die.

"Oh, Claude! Claude!" she cried. "Even yet there are some strange things connected with the accusation against me that I cannot fathom."

"Tell me what you can of them, Lucy, and we will endeavour by our joint efforts to come to some conclusion concerning them."

"You know, Claude, that my uncle, General Sir George Everton, resided at Camden House, and his kindness to me was more that of a parent to a child than aught else. He loaded me with favours—was never weary of listening even to all my girlish caprices, and he made no secret of the fact that I was to become his heiress."

"And he judged wisely and well, my Lucy. But tell me of this man, Mossy Pendell. Is he in truth your cousin?"

"I am constrained to believe so. He was in the army for a while, as I was told, but leaving it for some inexplicable cause, he threw himself upon the generosity of General Everton, who, when appealed to in that fashion, always responded with an open hand."

Then he was not at first a resident of your uncle's house?"

"Oh, no, Claude! I had been more than a year the idol of my poor uncle's heart before Mossy Pendell's arrival at Camden House. At first he appeared to treat me with marked distinction and respect, but from some instinctive loathing, I shrunk from him."

Lucy shuddered as she spoke.

"He then tried caresses, and I threatened to complain to my uncle."

"The villain," said Duval. "When next we meet I will treat him to a caress of such a character that he shall hardly require another."

"Heed him not--heed him not, Claude! If ever there breathed a mortal man immeasurably beneath your contempt, that man is Mossy Pendell."

"Nay, Lucy, such reptiles must be crushed. But proceed with your story. What next?"

"Mossy Pendell introduced a friend of his—one Lord Horlop—to Camden House."

"Lord Horlop? I fancy I have heard the name as that of a dissolute son of some Court nobleman."

"My good uncle, with his unsuspicious nature, was hospitable to every one, and received Lord Horlop kindly; nor did I discover the reason of his presence, until one day he audaciously demanded my hand in marriage."

"Ah!" said Claude. "I fancy I shall have something to say to Lord Horlop likewise."

"I rejected him firmly and decisively, and then my cousin, Mossy Pendell who appeared to have been listening in an adjoining room, stepped into the apartment where we were, and used these remarkable words: 'The orphan girl who can refuse the hand of a nobleman like Lord Horlop, would be quite capable of committing a great crime and suffering for it on the public scaffold!'"

"Those words had a meaning, Lucy."

"They had, although at the time they were uttered they were perfectly inexplicable to me. I hesitated long whether to inform the General of all that had taken place, and I did not do so until goaded to it by another circumstance that would have made longer silence on my part almost criminally weak."

"And what was that?"

"Lord Horlop, assisted by Mossy Pendell, my cousin, made an attempt one evening after the General had retired to rest, to force me into a carriage they had in waiting but my cries alarmed the household, and I informed my uncle of the outrage, who, from that moment forbade them both the house?"

"You were then free from the persecutions of these heartless men?"

"I thought myself so, but Mossy Pendell showed such a world of repentance, and shed so many tears, that I interceded with my uncle for his forgiveness, and he returned apparently penitent and subdued."

Claude shook his head.

"A wolf, Lucy, although it may be cowed for a time, should never be trusted."

"I found so, for within one little week after that time, being at one of those entertainments called a drum given by a lady of quality, who was an old and dear friend of the Generals, the coach which was conveying me home was assailed by Lord Horlop and his myrmidons, and to my own terror and alarm, as well as those of my uncle, I was kept from Camden House the whole night, and then offered a Fleet marriage, as Lord Horlop insolently said, to patch up what would be my wounded reputation."

"The worse than villain!"

"But I escaped them even then. There was no wounded reputation, Claude, to patch up by an union with such a man, and after that event my my uncle was implacable against them both."

Claude drew a long breath.

"Let me live in hope," he said, "that this same Lord Horlop and I may yet meet face to face."

"Heed him not! heed him not! But let me tell you all. My poor uncle fell dangerously ill. His physicians could give no name to his malady. There was a woman in the house in the capacity of a sick-nurse, who you may remember appeared at my trial."

"I remember her well. She gave the most dangerous evidence against you, and was named Mrs. Antrobus."

"She was ; and you will remember, Claude, how she swore that upon weak pretences I persuaded her to leave my uncle's room, and that upon her return she had found some suspicious liquid in a teacup, which she treasured up and produced after my uncle's death."

"I remember—I remember !"

"The physicians declared the liquid to be a virulent poison, and as a phial containing some more of the decoction was found in my own writing desk, it needed but little else to convince judge, jury, and the world that I was a murderess. Oh, Claude ! I knew nothing of that poison, that cup, and decoction, until they were all produced as terrible evidence against me."

Lucy trembled and sobbed convulsively.

You shall tell me no more !" cried Claude. "I know enough, and more than enough. All the mystery of this hideous villany shall yet be brought to light, or my name is not Claude Duval."

"Alas !" said Lucy ; "it is too late."

"Say not so, Lucy. It may be too late to undo the evil that has been accomplished but it is not too late for retribution upon the evil doers."

The day was sunny and beautiful on the Heath of Hampstead, and to see Claude Duval and Lucy wandering about those luxuriant gardens—long neglected by the hand of man, and left to their own wild will—one might have imagined they were two persons who had cast from them all the cares and anxieties of the bustling world, and determined for a happy future to live but for each other.

And then the shadows of evening came.

Lucy clung more fondly to the arm of her lover—her husband.

"Oh, Claude !" she cried ; if you could only forsake this mode of life how happy we might be in the humblest cottage that ever afforded a shelter to true and gentle hearts."

Duval shook his head.

"It may not be, Lucy. I was born for a life like this, or for higher flight still ; and some day, dear one, when better leisure serves, I will tell you how and why it was I took to the road."

"Leisure, Claude ? What leisure like the present ?"

Duval glanced in the direction of the western sky.

The sun had just dipped below the horizon, leaving behind it a path of gold, crimson, and every gorgeous combination of colour that can be imagined.

"My time has come !" he said. "I have business on Bagshot Heath to-night, but shall return by one o'clock."

Lucy sighed.

"Oh, what a life is this so full of danger !"

"I have ceased to regard it as such, Lucy. At first I thought my career was full of hair-breadth 'scapes, but now I have ceased to think so, and counsel you to fear nothing, but to look to my arrival in safety with perfect confidence."

"I will strive to do so," said Lucy mournfully.

"Behold this little silver horn," said Duval ; "it looks but a toy, and yet it can produce most exquisite notes."

He blew twice upon it, and the long mournful sounds produced were of the highest musical quality.

"I know, Lucy," he said, "you will be waiting and watching for me, and when you hear one of these notes you will be sure that I have arrived."

"I shall listen for it," said Lucy, "until fancy will almost produce it upon the night air."

There was a now rustling among the branches of a neighbouring tree, and Blossom, leading Nightshade by the bridle, made his appearance.

"Shall I accompany you, captain ?"

"No, Blossom, this is one of my nights alone. Look for me at one, and leave the iron gate on the latch. Lucy, farewell! Hark! there is eight o'clock. Five hours will soon pass away, when I shall return, I hope, with a good account of my night's adventures."

It was quite evident from this enforced gaiety of manner that Claude Duval rather dreaded a sentimental leave-taking on these occasions when he went forth to the road.

He wished to make such proceedings common-place occurrences; and now springing upon the back of Nightshade, and waving his arm he trotted from the gardens of the old mansion at a rapid pace, and crossed the Heath.

Duval was in full costume, such as we have seen him in on previous occasions; but being slim, tall, and lithe of figure, he had the advantage of being able to put one dress on over another without looking in the least extraordinary as regarded bulk.

On this occasion he wore a great coat, such as substantial yeomen or gentlemen farmers might put on.

And where the skirts of the great coat terminated he wore an artificial pair of "tops," such as belonged to top-boots, and which gave him the appearance of wearing those rather clumsy feet appendages.

His hat was of plain black beaver, and he carried a riding whip in his hand with a heavy thong, the handle ornamented with silver.

Thus equipped and attired, Claude Duval presented anything but a threatening aspect, and anybody might have met him on the road without taking the least alarm at his appearance.

Immediately upon getting clear of Hampstead Heath, he made the best of his way across the country to that celebrated resort of highwaymen, Bagshot.

But Duval had no special adventure in view; he merely intended to take the chances the heath or the road might afford to him.

Heavy banks of clouds after sunset had come up from the west, and the sky was now so greatly obscured, that although the moon must have risen, its influence through the vapoury shroud that rolled between it and the earth was only sufficient to produce a hazy dim kind of twilight.

The Heath then looked boundless as Claude Duval reached it, and the silence was so profound of the apparently desolate spot, that Duval, perhaps for the first time in his life, felt that shrinking dislike to absolute solitude that is so incidental to human nature.

A dim white mist, too, seemed to be rising from the earth, and although this might be considered in some respects propitious to the proceedings of a knight of the road, yet in others it was specially perplexing.

"Halt, Nightshade!" said Claude, as he patted the neck of his steed. "I know not if it has been quite wise of us to venture forth to-night on to this desolate heath, for we seem to be the only living things in its vast expanse. Ah! What is that?"

Something dashed so close past the eyes of Claude Duval that he involuntarily jerked the bridle of Nightshade, causing the well-trained animal to execute a leap that would have unhorsed a less skilful rider than the celebrated highwayman.

Then Duval laughed.

"It was but a bat," he said, "that brushed my cheek with its leathery wings—it was but a bat, after all! How silent and desolate the Heath is! If this mist rises any higher I shall lose sight of the tree-tops, and hardly find my way off it in time to keep my word with Lucy."

A bright speck of light, apparently about two or three hundred yards in advance of him, appeared through the darkness of the air. Duval bent low in his saddle to watch it. The light moved over the surface of the Heath, not exactly in a straight line, but in that sort of manner which it would pre-

sent if carried by some person picking their way among the furze bushes and stunted vegetation of the common. Duval kept his eyes fixed upon this moving light which cast so limited a radiance about it, that he could see nothing of the person who carried it. In fact, a kind of superstitious fear began to creep over him, that it was not carried by mortal hands at all.

But Claude Duval was the last man to be the slave of such fancies as these, and he soon discarded the irrational supposition.

He put Nightshade to a gentle walk, and in such a direction that if the bearer of the light continued the same course he was pursuing, Claude must inevitably meet him at a point not very far distant.

But the light suddenly paused.

It then moved lower and became stationary, and as it cast about it a strange halo through the white mist, Duval, to his surprise, saw that it shone upon some object—human figure or otherwise—of preternatural height.

Then there came some shrieking, horrible cries upon the night air.

Some of those cries were articulate, and evidently expressed the intense agony of some bereaved soul.

"This one—this one!" cried the voice—"this one, the best beloved of all—this one to meet with such an end! This one so fair, and once so good! Crows and ravens picking at his eyes, and I not able to save him!"

Shrieks and cries that contained no element of human sense about them, succeeded these few wildly uttered words. Duval felt a cold chill at his heart. Slowly, however, he advanced—keeping Nightshade to the same walking pace, and in three minutes more he was sufficiently near to the light and to the objects it shone upon to come to a just conclusion in regard to them. There was a tall, upright post erected on the Heath. A cross piece at right angles, supported by a strong spur of wood, sufficiently indicated what the erection was. A gibbet! A gibbet from which hung in chains a human form!

A ghastly semblance of humanity, encircled in that cage-like structure, which was calculated to hold together for as long a time as possible the rotting, decaying bones and muscles of a malefactor, who the genius of the law at that period thought it wise to present swinging and creaking to the air of heaven as a warning to evil doers.

At the foot of the gibbet was placed the lantern.

Crouching down by the side of the lantern, and swaying to and fro, and uttering shrieks and cries of mortal agony, was a human form.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLAUDE DUVAL MEETS WITH A STRANGE ADVENTURE ON BAGSHOT HEATH.

It was the positions of the light on the ground at the foot of the gibbet, and shining through that white mist which had risen up, after sunset, from the surface of the Heath, which gave so lurid and supernatural an appearance to the whole scene.

But Claude Duval could not be otherwise than somewhat shocked at the aspect of that terrible object on the gibbet, which seemed to typify the probable fate that might befall all persons in his career.

Often and often, too, had he traversed Bagshot Heath, but his eyes had never lit upon this spectacle, which probably arose from two causes.

In the first place, the spot on which the malefactor was hung in chains was remote from all the roads and bridle-tracks across the common.

Secondly, Claude Duval had never sought that region, except in the dusk of the evening, or the absolute darkness of the night.

Nightshade seemed to recoil from the spectacle on the gibbet; and it was with difficulty Duval could keep the creature with its face towards the ghastly sight.

For a few moments there was a pause in the wild ejaculations and outcries of the crouching figure. Then she spoke again. We say she, for by this time Claude Duval had seen enough of the costume of the wretched creature to be assured that it was a woman who thus, in the silence of the night, uttered such wailing cries at the feet of the dead.

"Who will save him now—who will save him now? Will the false brother do so? No, no—a thousand times no! He will leave him to suffer for the crimes he never committed! I offered myself to the hands of the executioner, but he would not have me! Oh, save him from the hawks and kites, or, in mercy, heaven, let me go mad, and fancy that he still lives!"

It would be quite impossible for any words to express the agony of tone in which these expressions were uttered. Claude Duval listened to them with profound pity. "Hilloa! hilloa!" he shouted. "Why are you here alone upon the Heath? and who is it whose death you mourn upon that ghastly gibbet?"

The wretched woman uttered a shriek of dismay. She immediately extinguished the lanterns she had carried to that lonely spot. And then, as far as regards Claude Duval, the gibbet, with its swinging malefactor, and the woman who mourned so bitterly at its foot, alike, disappeared as though they had been visions conjured up by his fancy. The white mist, that had risen up from the surface of the Heath, had materially thickened and increased, so that every object was shrouded in it that did not stand at least eight or ten feet above the surface of the ground.

"Listen to me," cried Claude Duval. "I am a friend, if you are willing that I should be such; and whether you want a friend or not, at all events you have nothing from me to fear."

There was no reply.

Duval dismounted from Nightshade, and, leading it by the bridle, he made his way, as nearly as he could guess, in the direction of the gibbet.

But by some reason he missed it.

After a fruitless search of some few minutes he gave it up.

Passing his hand over his eyes, he muttered to himself, "Am I but half awake, and is all this but a dream? Often and often as I have been upon the common, I have seen nothing of such a spectacle as that which has met my eyes to-night."

Duval mounted Nightshade again.

He patted the faithful friend and companion of his night's adventure on the neck.

"Nightshade, we shall have to return home without booty to-night. This white mist seems inclined to deepen to a fog."

But even as Claude Duval spoke, some change seemed to be taking place in the atmosphere around him. It was suddenly getting lighter, and a bright tinge began to pervade it. Then he felt certain that the mist was dissipating. A brisk wind careered over the Heath.

The white vapour curled itself up as though by some word of command; and as the moon looked down upon the earth, through a bread rift in the clouds above, the atmosphere on the common became perfectly clear and transparent, so that every tree, every bush, every wild flower, and every blade of grass were distinctly visible.

"Ah, Nightshade!" cried Duval; "we shall yet have sport to-night!"

He turned his horse's head towards the eastern sky as he spoke, and then he started to find that he was within three or four feet only of the gibbet.

A glance around him showed that he had reached, accidentally, a very wild and desolate portion of the Heath, which he had never before seen

Then he looked up at the dead man swinging in his chains. The figure looked preternaturally long as it there hung swinging in the night air.

And full on to the dead face fell the bright moonbeams. Duval started. What was there in that face that came upon him like a recollection? Still and ghastly in death, as they were, he felt certain that he had looked upon that face, or its living likeness, somewhere recently, but he could not at the moment sufficiently collect his scattered senses to remember where the features had met his eyes. The hair was of a very peculiar colour. A kind of blue-black, which, once seen, could not readily be forgotten. A cold sort of sneer sat upon the face of the dead. It seemed as if that expression must have been familiar to the living man, and that he had died with it stamped upon his features.

"There is some mystery in all this," said Claude Duval, "which time may develop. Farewell, for the present, unhappy wretch! Whatever your crimes may have been, this is a ghastly retribution?"

Nightshade made some uneasy gestures, and began to paw the ground.

Well did Duval know the acute senses of his horse, and that these motions were indicative of the fact of some living thing approaching on the common.

A faint noise, as of the tread of horses' feet and the roll of carriage-wheels over one of the rough roads, in a few seconds more came to the ears of Duval.

Like two great blazing eyes, he saw two carriage-lamps coming rapidly across the Heath.

"We shall have some sport, Nightshade," he said; "and my name is not Claude Duval if I do not say 'Stand and deliver!' to these people, be they whom they may."

The carriage rapidly approached; and as it neared him, Duval saw that it was a pair-horse travelling chariot, with several imperials and boxes strapped to it, and driven, as was then the custom, by a postilion.

Duval tightened his rein, and, feeling his feet well in the stirrups, was about to dash forward, and call upon the postilion to halt, when he was spared the trouble by the vehicle suddenly coming to a stand-still.

"Idiot!" shouted an angry voice from the interior of the carriage. "Idiot! where have you driven to now! You are off the track, for I can feel the wheels are on the turf."

"I couldn't help it, my lord," replied the frightened postilion. "The near horse has been dragging his way all over the Heath."

"Use your whip—use your whip!"

"It's no use, my lord. I must get down and change the horses to different sides."

"Fool! Am I to be detained because you don't know how to harness your cattle? I have half a mind to alight, and lay your own whip about your lazy shoulders."

"It's not my fault, my lord," said the postilion, sulkily. "I didn't harness the cattle."

"Be quick about what you have to do. This is most provoking, to be detained in the middle of Bagshot Heath, and on just such a night, too, as would suit some of those gentry of the road to cry 'Stand and deliver!' in."

"I can't help it, my lord."

"Don't answer me, scoundrel! You should help it!"

Duval smiled to himself.

"At all events," he thought, "when I attack his lordship, I shall not have much to fear from any active assistance the postilion may render him."

The change in the relative position of the horses was being rapidly effect-

ed, and then Duval became aware that there was another person in the carriage beside the imperious lord who had spoken so furiously to the postilion.

"I am frightened to death!" said a female voice.

"Which is not of the slightest use," cried my lord, snappishly.

Duval quietly trotted up to the side of the carriage. The lady uttered a scream. His lordship an oath. Duval looked in at the open window.

"A fine night, my lord," he said, "as you remarked, for some gentry on the road who say, 'Stand and deliver!' I have the honour to be one of them."

"Take that, then!"

Bang! A pistol-shot passed so closely before the eyes of Duval that they almost seemed singed with the heat of the bullet.

"Ah!" said Claude; "that was not so bad!"

The lady screamed, and flung herself upon his lordship.

"Help, help! Murder! We shall be killed! Give him some money, and let him go! Oh, my lord Horlop, I thought you were one of the best of tempers."

"My lord who?" cried Duval. "Is this Lord Horlop?"

"I am Lord Horlop, fellow; and if this old woman will only let my arm go I have another pistol-bullet at your service!"

"Old woman!" shrieked the lady. "Gracious heaven! has it come to this and only six hours married?"

"Hands off, I say!" shouted Horlop—for it was, indeed, that mendacious nobleman. "Hands off, I say! and let me get my other pistol!"

"Alas, alas! I see it all now!" cried the lady. "In my old age I have shown more than the folly of youth. I have married this man, who now casts me off with contempt. Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!"

"Well, madam," said Horlop, "since marriages are made in heaven, you must be content to believe that this one is perfectly right and proper. You married me for my title. You are sixty-seven, and I thirty-one. I married you for your sixty thousand pounds—settled on yourself, it is true, but with a reversion to me at your death, and the sooner that event comes off the better. Don't claw hold of me in this fashion! Where's my other pistol?"

"If you stir hand or foot, my lord," said Duval, "I will blow your brains out with as little compunction as I would those of a mad dog!"

Duval imparted an emphasis to these words by thrusting the muzzle of a pistol exactly against the temple of Lord Horlop.

"What hinders me," added Duval, "from relieving this unfortunate woman of a brutal husband, and at the same time avenging Lucy Everton?"

"Lucy Everton!" ejaculated Lord Horlop.

"Yes. Does not that name appal you?"

"Confusion!"

"Yes, my Lord Horlop, to your confusion you have met her avenger, even here upon Bagshot Heath."

Horlop trembled.

"I suppose I am to be murdered here in cold blood," he said.

"No, my lord. My blood is hot enough when I think of your conduct to a young defenceless girl, abandoned by one who should have been her natural protector, but who, on the contrary, aided you in your villainous purposes."

"I know not what you mean," said Horlop gloomily.

"Perhaps your lordship has no such acquaintance then, as Mossy Pendell?"

Horlop started. He was, however, still more surprised by an exclamation that immediately came from the lips of Claude Duval, and which seemed to bear no relation whatever to the subject upon which they were conversing.

"Ah!" cried Duval; "now I recollect well. The malefactor on the gibbet is the likeness, in all respects, of Mossy Pendell."

The elderly lady in the carriage now began to wring her hands, and moan bitterly.

"Take comfort, madam," said Duval. "The next best thing to have preserved you liberty and money from such a man as this is to recover both, and I have a quarrel with my Lord Horlop which may bring about that desirable end."

"He means to murder me," said Horlop.

"Oh, spare him!" said the lady. "Bad and wicked as he is, oh, spare his life!"

"He has already aimed at mine," said Duval; "and shot for shot would be but fair play. I waive that consideration, however, since he fired at me in my capacity of a highwayman; and now, in that capacity, I say my lord your watch, money, and such valuables as you have about you."

"Take them."

"That is well."

"Take all, and be off!"

"The highwayman is satisfied."

"Then the sooner the highwayman takes himself away, the better."

"He is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes; the highwayman of Bagshot Heath is gone, but the avenger of the insulted Lucy Everton remains. And now, my Lord Horlop, if you be a peer and a gentleman, I insult you, and challenge you to mortal combat!"

As he spoke, Duval took off one of his gloves, and struck Lord Horlop twice in the face with it.

This indignity was responded to by a yell of rage.

"Let me out—let me out! Get away from the door, and let me out! I will soon take signal vengeance for all this!"

"Certainly, my lord! Here, postilion!"

"Yes, sir."

"Open the door for his lordship."

The postilion obeyed, and Lord Horlop sprung out upon the Heath. There was just a faint suspicion on the mind of Claude Duval that Lord Horlop might take to his heels and flee. But such was not the case. There was either some genuine physical courage in this man's disposition, or anger at that moment took the place of it.

"Now, Mr. Highwayman!" he cried. "Dismount, and we will see if I can not rid Bagshot Heath of such a pest as you."

"Still, Nightshade—still!" said Duval, as he hastily dismounted, and turned towards Lord Horlop.

The bright moonbeams now fell full upon the face and figure of Duval, so that Lord Horlop had no difficulty in taking a good view of him, and to some extent calculating the chances of a personal encounter.

The tall, slim, graceful figure.

The easy carriage, and that appearance of nervous agility which characterized Claude Duval, convinced Lord Horlop that he had entered upon an adventure of considerable danger.

Duval deliberately took off the overcoat he wore, and as he was doing so Lord Horlop thought he saw an opportunity of putting an end to the contest at once without personal risk. He suddenly drew his sword and dashed forward at Duval. But the latter was too quick for him. Leaping on one side, he disentangled himself from the overcoat and flung it full in the face of Horlop, who, for a few seconds, was entangled with it, and at the mercy of Claude.

But the latter disdained to take such an advantage, and coolly placing himself upon his guard, he drew his sword, saying as he did so, "Now, my lord, that all preliminaries are arranged, we can proceed to business, which on this occasion, so far as I am concerned, is combined with pleasure."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLAUDE DUVAL FIGHTS A DUEL WITH LORD HORLOP.

LORD HORLOP glanced at Claude Duval like an enraged tiger. There can be no question but that he would gladly have taken the life of the man who so coolly and calmly braved him and forced him to account at the sword's point for his misdeeds. The manner, too, in which Claude Duval had taken his attempted assassination while off his guard filled Lord Horlop with a thousand fears.

No man, without the most abundant confidence in himself, could possibly act as Claude Duval did.

It was an exhibition of the extremest confidence in the result of the encounter.

It was as if Duval had said, "I know perfectly well my own powers, and what will ensue from this conflict, that I can put up with anything antecedent to it."

But there was no escape. Horlop was brought to bay. There, upon that desolate common, as though fate had hurried him forward to a terrible destiny, he faced the man who was to avenge the wrongs of Lucy Everton.

Horlop whispered to himself in low tones, "I shall be killed—my time has come!"

He took that strange, wandering look about him that men will do when they think they are bidding fare-well to the world for ever.

There was the coach, with that wretched woman in it who had sold herself to the unprincipled nobleman for the mere glitter of a name.

There was the boy-postilion, with mouth and eyes wide open, indicative both of the alarm and interest he felt in the transaction.

The affair was something for that boy to speak of in after life, when time had furrowed his cheek and whitened his hair.

And there, creaking to and fro upon its gibbet hideously, was the body of the malefactor.

The clouds parted right and left, leaving the moon, in its full radiance, to shine down upon the scene.

"Now, my lord," said Claude Duval; "we waste valuable time."

"Have at you, then!" cried Horlop, with a feeling of desperation. "I will, at least, rid society of you!"

This was a boast.

A mere effort at bravado.

He had no notion in the world of being able to rid society of Claude Duval, but believed that his own last hour had come; and he only fought with the desperate feeling of a man who knew that, do what he might, he could not make things worse.

The swords clashed together.

And now the lady in the carriage, in the terror of the moment, began to scream "Murder!"

The post-boy took the alarm, and added his screams to hers.

And so, amid the echoing tumult of those shouts, Lord Horlop and Claude Duval fought.

The combat was a brief one.

Horlop relied—if he relied upon anything—on a long-practised skill as a fencer.

But Duval had the same skill, and with it a strength of arm and suppleness of wrist far superior to anything that Lord Horlop could bring to bear upon the contest.

Suddenly Horlop half sunk to the earth. His sword had flown from his grasp, and lay some distance from him on the green turf.

He seemed to feel then that his last hour had come. The man was not deficient in physical courage, but at such a moment human nature is weak.

“Mercy !” he ejaculated.

Claude Duval stayed his hand.

“If I were to show you such mercy as you would exhibit in a similar occasion to this, my sword blade would pass through your heart ; but, as it is, my Lord Horlop, we shall meet again !”

Duval turned from the half prostrate man, and was in the act of returning his own sword to the scabbard.

Horlop seized the opportunity, and making a spring towards his own weapon, he raised it from the grass, and before Duval could disengage his sword again from its half-way progress into its sheath, Lord Horlop, with a yell of rage and satisfaction, made a furious lunge at him.

Ripping up the crimson velvet coat. Carrying with it a piece of the embroidered waistcoat. Grazing the skin of Claude Duval just over the region of the heart, and causing a sudden effusion of blood that looked dangerous, although it was not so in reality, Lord Horlop’s sword seemed to have done all the mischief he intended.

And for the moment Claude Duval might be excused for imagining some serious mischief had been done him.

“Ah !” he cried, “that was a treacherous thrust !”

Horlop drew back his sword-arm to repeat it. But that instant of time was sufficient to enable Duval to put himself on his guard.

His drawn sword was in his hand again. Scarcely knowing, then, whether he were seriously wounded or not, he rushed upon Horlop, who but feebly defended himself. The swords clashed together for a few seconds, and then the bright blade of Claude Duval’s weapon passed right through the breast of the dissipated and treacherous nobleman. With a half-stifled cry, Lord Horlop fell backwards. He rolled over twice upon the green turf of the common, and then lay profoundly still, with his eyes fixed as though intently gazing at the moon.

Duval stepped up to the coach.

“Madam,” he said, “you are a widow !”

The lady screamed “Murder !”

“Nay, be thankful,” said Duval ; “for under ordinary circumstances, my Lord Horlop must have outlived you, and what would have been your existence as the wife of such a man ?”

“Wretch !—villain !” cried the lady.

“Madam !”

“I hope I shall live, and it will only be with the hope of seeing you hanged !”

“This is gratitude and thankfulness,” said Duval ; “and I have but one consolation, which is true, that I did not fight this man in your quarrel but in my own.”

“Villain ! I will give an alarm, and I here offer ten thousand pounds for your capture !”

“A large sum, madam ; and if I am ever particularly in want of money, I shall almost feel inclined to give myself up at such a price. As it is, how-

ever, I bid you farewell, and leave you under the more fortunate circumstances, if you would but think so, of having the companionship of the dead Lord Horlop instead of the living one."

Duval turned to the direction where he had left his horse.

"Ho, Nightshade! This way, boy!"

The creature trotted up to him.

Duval placed his hand on the saddle, and was about to mount, when, with shouts and cries—apparently with no other object than to encourage each other—there came over the heath a strong party of mounted men, making directly for the coach and its immediate neighbourhood.

"Hoy! hoy!" cried the post-boy; "this way! this way! Murder! murder! Hoy! hoy!"

"My lad," said Duval, "if you value your insignificant existence, you will hold your tongue."

"I can't hold my tongue!" said the boy. "He promised me a guinea; and I shan't get it now—'cos why? You've been and gone and killed him!"

"Is that all?"

"Yes; and enough too!"

"I'll give you five. Hold your tongue."

The post-boy was as quiet as a mouse.

Duval picked up the hat of Lord Horlop, which lay close to the carriage.

"Away, Nightshade, away!" he cried; and he flung the hat towards a clump of young pine trees some short distance off.

Nightshade galloped away in that direction; and Duval knew that when he chose to recover his steed he would find it, as it had been trained to do, keeping watch and ward over the hat.

"Now, madam," said Duval, as he leaped into the carriage, "I shall trouble you to help me play a part which will not be attended with any difficulty."

"I play a part?"

"Yes, madam; unless your affection for the deceased Lord Horlop is so great that you would rather join him in another and a better world."

"Would you murder me?"

"Murder, madam, is an ugly word; but I may have to kill you for self-preservation."

The lady screamed.

"Hush!"

The horsemen surrounded the carriage.

"Hilloa!" cried one; "what is all this? What is amiss upon the heath?"

"We have been attacked by a highwayman," said Duval; "but I rather think he has got the worst of it."

"Indeed, sir! Where is he?"

"Don't call me sir; I will trouble you to say your Grace."

"I will beg pardon, your Grace. I am an officer of the police, and my name is Muckles. We are on the lookout for the notorious highwayman, Claude Duval."

"I don't think you need look far, then."

"Indeed!"

"Hilloa, fellow! when you speak to me, say your Grace."

"I beg pardon again, your Grace; but where is this Claude Duval?"

"Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" shouted another voice; "he's settled at last! Here he lies, Mr. Muckles!"

"Ah! what is that you say, Swallow?"

"Here he is, Mr. Muckles! here he is! You may see him in the moonlight. No, you won't."

As chance would have it, at that instant a dense black cloud swept over the face of the moon.

Al! was darkness on Bagshot Heath but for the carriage lamps, and so of the hand-lanterns carried by the officers in their waist-belts.

"This is unfortunate," said Duval; "because I wished you to identify the rascal. I have had some trouble with him; and there he lies."

"Pick him up! pick him up!" cried Muckles. "I should know him among a thousand."

"We must be humane," said Duval, "even to such a man. Bring him into the coach. I am quite sure my wife will make room for him."

"Wretch! monster!" cried the lady, who since the death of Lord Horlop seemed inclined to take his part so furiously, and to look upon Claude Duval as his most unjustifiable murderer.

"Exactly so," said Claude Duval; "he is a wretch and monster; but still, let us be humane, for the breath of life may still linger within him."

The officers raised the body of Lord Horlop.

As they opened the coach-door on one side, to place it within, Duval quietly got out at the other.

He ran fleetly across the common towards the clump of trees where he knew he should find Nightshade.

Another moment, and he was in the saddle.

"Hilloa, Mr. Muckles!" he cried; "if you want Claude Duval, he is here; but as he happens to be mounted on his horse Nightshade, he has no objection to a race over Bagshot Heath, for any stakes you like to mention."

Muckles raised a shout of rage and alarm.

"Done brown again!" cried Swallow. "I knowed it, Mr. Muckles, I knowed it! Done brown again!"

Duval did not wait to hear what further took place among the officers; but, putting Nightshade to speed, he galloped over the common in the direction of town.

He felt that there was no further sport to be had upon the heath on that night, and, indeed, he wished for a short time to be left him before he redeemed his promise by returning to Hampstead Heath, in order that he might make an effort to discover who was in possession of Camden House.

It was not a very long gallop across the country to Kensington.

Upon arriving at the then pretty little royal village, Duval put up his horse at a famous old hostel called "The Crown and Scepter," where he knew by experience, not only that no questions would be asked as to who and what he was, but that none would be answered on the same subject.

On foot he made his way to the ancient residence that had once been the happy home of Lucy Everton, and her uncle, the General. The whole house seemed shrouded in darkness.

Duval slowly paced completely round its boundary walls, and could not discover the faintest ray of light from any of its windows.

The lateness of the hour might easily account, however, for that; but Claude had an irresistible curiosity to make his way into the gardens of that mansion which had for so long been the home of one now so near and so dear to him.

That there was some great mystery connected with this mansion, Claude Duval could not doubt for a moment; but what it was, surpassed all his powers of conjecture.

And had he been asked at that time what motive or ground of action he had for making his way into those gardens he would have been indeed at a loss to reply.

His presence there was one of those impulsive or instinctive actions such as comes over men, from reasons which they are not able to give even to themselves, but which, in the result, turn out to be perfectly well founded.

The mysterious gloom of the mansion, and the sighing of the night wind

among the tall trees that surrounded it, reminded him something of his own home on Hampstead Heath.

"Why should I linger here?" he said. "I have no memories connected with this spot; and although it has been the home of Lucy, it cannot have been a happy one."

He turned towards the wall again, intending to make his way from the premises; but as he did so, a strange, faint cry came upon his ears. It might have been a night bird for all he knew. Or it might be the echo of some very distant sound indeed, which, travelling through the still air, reached that quiet spot. But it was sufficient to make Claude Duval pause. He turned and looked up at the house again, and as he did so, it seemed to stand out in bolder relief against the night sky.

Those black clouds, which had shrouded the moon and produced such a cavernous darkness on Bagshot Heath had not entirely passed away, but had thinned sufficiently to enable a faint glow of moonlight to penetrate them.

Hence the house looked nigher and Claude Duval, for the first time, was able to come to a very accurate conclusion about its shape and size.

But still why was he lingering there? Again he asked himself the question, and again he moved towards the portion of the wall by which he had entered the grounds. As he did so, he saw a shadow fall across the path nearest to him.

Duval shrunk back close to some bushes, which entirely concealed him, and then he felt convinced he was not alone in the gardens of Camden House, for he heard a footstep rapidly approaching.

Whoever the intruder upon that solitude was, he evidently felt no uncertainty about his route, nor was he careful to conceal his presence, for he crunched the gravel of the garden path under his feet with a steady tread.

The figure was tall, but there was something ungainly in the gait which came familiarly to the eyes of Duval.

He was certain he had seen that man somewhere, and it wanted but some tone, look, or movement, to enable Claude thoroughly to identify him.

The man paused and looked up to the house.

"All alone at last!" he said. "I have succeeded in clearing the place of all the servants, and now the time has come for action. Surely the fear of death will do something, even with a man so near the termination of his mortal career."

These few words were quite sufficient to enable Claude Duval to name this person, who was in the garden at so unseemly an hour.

"Mossy Pendell!" he said to himself. "It is Mossy Pendell!"

CHAPTER XV.

CLAUDE DUVAL FINDS HIMSELF IN THE SECRET CHAMBER OF CAMDEN HOUSE.

WITHOUT uttering another word, Pendell moved towards the house.

Duval followed him as cautiously as he could, so as, at the same time, to keep him in sight, and yet not expose himself to observation.

Pendell disappeared for a few seconds round an angle of the house, but Duval was quickly on his heels, and he saw him opening a low door, which evidently, from the difficulty he had in moving the lock, was not often used as a means of entrance into the premises.

Claude would fain have followed him, but the moment Mossy Pendell succeeded in opening this door, he passed through it, and closed it instantly from the inner side.

The determination of Claude Duval to make his way into Camden House was now so firm and distinct, that he did not hesitate in at once seeking for means to carry it into execution.

That the lower windows and the lower door would in all probability be too well secured to permit him to force them, Claude Duval concluded, but he thought it quite possible to effect an entrance through some of the windows of the upper story.

And to one so active and agile as Claude Duval, the difficulty was not so great as it might appear.

Clambering roses, and dense masses of variegated ivy found a home in front of this old mansion; and although, no doubt, for many a long year their stems had been lithe and tender, such was not now the case, and they had grown into trees of sufficient strength to repay, in some measure, the obligation of a support they had long received from the ancient mansion.

Claude Duval clambered up to the nearest window on the upper floor.

A touch opened it, and he found himself beneath the roof of Camden House; at all events, within five minutes of the time when Mossy Pendell had made his way through the little disused door. Duval listened. Listened to catch the slightest sound that might be within the mansion. He heard a door slammed shut. Then all was still.

Still as the grave for the space of about five minutes, when there came a peculiar cry, which, to Duval's apprehension, had very much the same tone about it as the sound he had heard in the garden.

But still the cry was too indistinct for him to take upon himself to say from which direction it came.

The suggestion of distress, however, which it bore to his mind, induced him to adopt the most energetic means to discover its origin.

All he could do was to go as quickly as possible from room to room of the mansion, in the hope of finding some solution to the mystery that was evidently connected with it.

Duval emerged from the apartment in which he was on to a staircase, and almost immediately that he did so, a flash of light came across his eyes, and looking over the gilt balustrade, he saw below Mossy Pendell, commence the ascent of the stairs, and bearing a light.

Nothing had happened, then, as yet.

Duval had succeeded in interrupting the villain in whatever might be his intention in Camden House; but in order to discover those intentions, it would not be wise to encounter him.

To keep a watchful eye upon him would surely not be difficult, especially as he, Mossy Pendell, could not have the slightest suspicion but that he was alone in Camden House.

That is to say, alone with the victim of his plots and plans. Alone with General Everton, his uncle, whom he was endeavouring to make the victim of his cupidity and his ambition. Claude Duval stepped back into the room again from which he had just emerged.

Mossy Pendell reached the head of the stairs, and passed onward along the corridor which immediately presented itself, and which went the whole depth of the house.

He paused at a door on his right hand, opened it gently, and entered a room, which shrouded him from the sight of Duval.

But the latter was quickly after him, and pausing at the door of that apartment, Claude listened for a few seconds, and hearing nothing, he pushed at it gently, and stepped into the room.

It was vacant.

The light that Mossy Pendell had carried stood upon a table, but although there seemed to be no other entrance or mode of exit from that apartment

but the one at which Claude Duval had just entered, Mossy Pendell was not there, but had disappeared, as though he had been some unsubstantial presence that had reached its destination, and had then exhaled into thin air.

This mystery was not long in endurance.

For a third time the strange wailing cry, as if of mental or bodily suffering, came upon the ears of Claude Duval.

But its echoes were now quenched by the loud tones of Mossy Pendell.

"Peace!" he cried. "You ask for life in vain while you refuse the simple means by which it can be granted to you."

"For your own sake—for the sake of your own immortal welfare," moaned a voice, "do not add crime upon crime! Mossy Pendell, only tell me that Lucy is alive and unharmed, and I will forgive you all!"

Duval's heart beat with emotion.

Who could it be who thus spoke in such terms of affectionate solicitude of Lucy? Of his Lucy? Was not the only person beside himself who would have done so silent in the grave? He listened still.

"You entreat in vain!" cried Pendell. "The only mode of escape from death is the one I propose to you. Sign this will which I now produce to you, and which leaves your property to me (I will manage that it be put in proper train to answer every purpose),—sign it, I say, and you shall be free; but refuse to do so, and your life is forfeit, while I, as heir-at-law of all your estates and properties, get easy possession of them."

"You are not my heir-at-law," was the reply. "And if you were, Lucy is co-heiress with you, for do you not both stand in the same relation to me? Moreover, your conduct to me has been such that my will is already made in her favour. Murder me, and you do but pave the way for her inheritance."

Claude Duval heard all this with such astonishment, that he might well be excused for doubting if he were in his waking senses.

The speech which he had just heard was one that ought to have been made by Lucy's uncle, General Everton; and yet was not General Everton dead; and had not Lucy herself been accused of his murder, and brought out actually to suffer on this infamous charge?

"This is a dream—this is a dream!" said Duval, as he pressed his hands over his eyes. "This can be nothing but a dream, compounded of the story I have heard from Lucy, and my own imagination in regard to the guilt of Mossy Pendell, and the murder of her uncle."

There was another mystery, too, connected with the whole affair, which might well assist in inducing a belief in the mind of Claude Duval that he was the victim of some delusion, and that was the strangely distinct manner in which the voices came upon his ears, at the same time that he felt confident no one was present in that apartment but himself.

Pendell spoke again.

"I promise you perfect freedom. I promise you likewise an income, which will be sufficient to enable you to pass the remainder of your years in peace and comfort."

"And if I still refuse?" asked the wailing voice.

"I swear by all that men hold sacred, you shall not live till morning."

Claude Duval might wonder where the voices came from, but he could have no doubt about the direction from which they proceeded.

He crept close to the wall of the room which separated the secret chamber where poor General Everton was a prisoner from that apartment.

He passed his hand over that wall.

A portion of it slightly moved.

It was the tall, artfully concealed door in the panel which Mossy Pendell had not thought it worth while to pull close shut after him.

"Murder!" shrieked the wailing voice.

"Take your death," cried Pendell, "since you will have it!"

"Help—help!"

"There is no help for you in this world; and as I do not believe in another, I may say there is no help at all."

Duval pushed the narrow panelled door wide open.

"Your faith fails you both ways!" he cried loudly. "Mossy Pendell, there is help here for your victim, although there may be none hereafter for you."

Pendell uttered a cry of dismay.

As Claude Duval stood in the doorway of that concealed apartment, his back was towards the light on the table in the outer room, so that his whole figure was thrown into bold relief notwithstanding that his face was in shadow, and it might have been difficult at the moment actually to recognise him.

Duval was too intent upon frustrating the evil intentions of Mossy Pendell, to notice that an old white-haired man fell in a swoon nearly at his feet, as he stepped into that narrow chamber.

Then Pendell made an effort to escape, but it only required for Claude Duval to put out an arm, and he was arrested.

"Villain!" cried Duval; "this night I have already executed summary justice upon your associate in crime, Lord Horlop. I scarcely hoped for the pleasure of ridding the world of two such fiends within so short a time."

Pendell sunk to the floor.

The action was so sudden that he wrenched himself from the grasp of Claude Duval, and availing himself of his momentary freedom, he scrambled to the door of the apartment, and was out on to the corridor before Duval could determine what to do.

That determination, however, was, of course, to pursue him; and it was sufficiently quickly formed to bring Claude sharply upon the heels of the fugitive. As chance would have it, Mossy Pendell rushed into the very apartment that Duval had entered by the window which he had opened from without. The window still swung idly open in the night air. Frantic with fear, Pendell took but one leap, and passed through the opening into the garden. Duval was scarcely inclined to follow him, and paused for a few seconds to note which way he went.

"Hold!" he cried, "or I fire!"

A shout of fear, and half of derision, came from Mossy Pendell, and he was so fast disappearing among the trees, that Duval saw the necessity of instant pursuit if he would not wholly lose him.

To leap from the windows was one thing, and a reckless, hazardous thing likewise; but to descend by the means of the rose and ivy stems was not difficult.

Duval was quickly in the garden, but Mossy Pendell had disappeared, and the ten minutes search in it was perfectly fruitless.

Vexed and chagrined that he had allowed the villain to escape him, Duval hastened back to the house.

By the same route which he had pursued in leaving it, he made his way to the same chamber again.

The light still burned on the table in the outer room, but upon raising it and taking it with him into the narrow, unsuspected apartment beyond, Duval was surprised to see that it was perfectly untenanted, and there was no one for him to save or sympathise with.

"Speak!" he cried; "if any one requiring aid is concealed in this place. I am no enemy. Speak, and be assured I come as a friend, to assist and to save."

All was still.

Again and again did Claude Duval, with the idea upon his mind that there might be some hiding-place that escaped his observation, call upon that white-haired man, whoever he might be, to declare himself.

There was no response to these repeated invitations, and then after half an hour spent in rambling from room to room in Camden House, Duval saw from one of the eastern windows that dawn was rapidly approaching.

He left the old mansion regretfully, and recovering his horse, he made the best of his way to Hampstead Heath, determined to relate to Lucy the interesting events of the night, or to consult her, perhaps, calmer judgment in regard to them.

A long slant ray of light shone upon the old tree tops as Duval reached that home which, since it had been adorned by the presence of Lucy, was no longer desolate nor melancholy.

With surprise, not unmingled with some portion of superstitious terror, did Lucy hear of what had happened at Camden House.

The description of the white-haired man who had called for help tallied so well with her remembrance of her uncle, that the whole affair became a wonder and a surprise, admitting of no rational explanation.

Was not that uncle in his grave?

Had not even she, Lucy, been accused of his murder?

Had there ever arisen, since those calamitous events until now, the slightest doubt of his decease?

Lost in a maze of conjectures, she could only, over and over again, talk of the matter to Claude Duval, and pray for some solution of the strange, inexplicable mystery.

CHAPTER XVI.

CLAUDE DUVAL VISITS THE MASKED BALL AT QUEENSBERRY HOUSE.

AN afternoon sun glances sweetly amid the old trees in the garden of Duval's Hampstead home.

Lucy is resting on his arm, and Duval is carelessly, although with some amount of curiosity, examining the contents of a pocket-book which he had possessed himself of from her ladyship of Queensberry, on the occasion of that remarkable cotillion in the Strand.

He took a card from it.

"Behold, Lucy !" he said. " Here is a card of invitation to a masked ball at Queensbury House !"

Lucy looked up in his face.

" You have not said it, Claude ; but you mean to go."

Duval smiled.

" Shall I own," he said, " that I have the greatest desire to show myself at that assembly, although I must confess that the life I like best is that upon the road ? Give me a cloudy sky, and the green turf beneath my horse's feet. I prefer all that to the sickly life of gilded saloons, whatever might be the profit of attaching myself to their fashionable frivolities."

" Then why go to this masked ball, Claude ? It seems to me that to you it must be full of danger."

" Perhaps. But then, you know, danger is the atmosphere in which I live and breathe ; so, for once, let me proceed to it, if for no other purpose than to hear what the great fashionable world has to say of Claude Duval."

Lucy no longer opposed Claude's disposition to this adventure ; but she made him promise that he would return betimes, after having satisfied him-

self in regard to what was the current gossip of the day, both in respect to himself, and to her escape from an ignominious death.

Duval rode to town between eight and nine o'clock in the evening, for the fashionable entertainments at that period commenced at a much earlier hour than they do now, however, they might be protracted into the small hours of the morning.

On this occasion, Duval took his man Blossom with him ; and upon reaching the neighbourhood of Queensberry House Duval gave him his final instructions.

" You will put up the horses, Blossom, anywhere in this neighbourhood you think proper ; but by one o'clock in the morning see that you be in waiting for me just within the palings of the Green Park, yonder."

" All right, Captain you won't have to look for me twice."

" That I well know. And now, farewell for the present."

Masked balls at that period were a fashionable entertainment still, although they were certainly in their decadence.

The very high nobility and cream of the aristocracy of the country were beginning to repudiate that species of entertainment, which could not but carry with it a great amount of vulgarity.

Some very notable and scandalous intrigues likewise had been concocted and carried out at these masked balls ; so that the fashion for holding them was gradually descending in that scale of society.

This one at Queensberry House was the last ever held beneath the roof of that mansion.

And as we see at present, when a drawing-room or levee is held at St. James's Palace there are Court suits to be hired in the immediate neighbourhood ; so, when a masked ball at the time of which we write was held in one of the great houses of London, costumes, masks, disguises, and dominos could be hired to any extent in the immediate vicinity of the place of meeting.

Claude Duval repaired to one of these places, and over the complete highwayman's dress he wore he placed what was called a domino, which merely consisted of a cloak with sleeves that reached from the throat to the heels, completely shrouding whatever dress was worn beneath, and forming, with the assistance of a mask, a much more perfect disguise than any costume—properly so called—could produce.

Many of these dominos were so made that they could be turned with ease, looking quite perfect upon either side, and presenting at the same time a total dissimilarity of colour.

Duval took care that the one he provided himself with possessed that convenience.

His next step was to hire a sedan chair, of which there were numbers to be had at every turning ; and taking care to keep in his hand the card of admission he had accidentally become possessed of, he gave orders to be carried at once to Queensberry House.

The crowd was immense.

The reputation of the Queensberry family did not stand very high, but inasmuch as the vast majority of the persons who frequented such entertainments were themselves of doubtful character, there was no hindrance to the saloons of the lordly mansion being excessively crowded.

It was with great difficulty that Claude Duval's sedan chair reached the entrance hall. Once there, however, there was no further obstruction. His ticket of admission was hastily glanced at, and then torn in two, one half being flung into a basket ready there for the reception of such fragments, and the other being handed back to him.

This precaution was taken in case of any of the masks wishing to retire or change their dominos, and then requiring admission again to the saloons.

Up the grand staircase into the principal ball-room of the mansion Duval made his way, not without some difficulty, for the thoroughfare was crowded with maskers.

The sight that met his eyes upon fairly entering the brilliant saloon transcended anything he had imagined in the way of brilliancy and effect.

At least six hundred persons were there present, in every variety of costume that all the varied climes of the world could suggest.

There was no difficulty in mingling in such a throng and being wholly unobserved, but, as chance would have it, Duval trod on the skirts of a domino worn by a gentleman who turned round rather fiercely to question him.

The gentleman, was masked, but Duval had no difficulty in recognising the tones of the Duke of Montrose, with whom he had had the adventure on Hampstead Heath, when accompanied by the Marquis of Harcourt.

"You are clumsy, sir !" said the Duke.

"Very, sir," said Duval.

"You admit it, sir ?"

"It would be so rude to contradict your Grace,"

"Ah, you know me ?"

"Who can mistake those dulcet tones ?"

"Pshaw, sir! you rather exceed the license even of a masquerade."

"And you fall short of it," said Duval; "for you have not the wit to keep yourself concealed."

"Sir," said the Duke, in tones of anger, "if it were not that a quarrel in such a place as this is quite out of the question, I should feel inclined to have one with you; but since by some accident you know who I am, it is but fair that I should know you."

"I have no objection."

"Well, sir—your name ?"

"I am Claude Duval, the celebrated highwayman!"

The Duke of Montrose stamped on the floor passionately.

"Stuff, sir!" he said. "That is a silly jest"

Duval laughed, and the Duke, after darting at him a furious look through the eye-holes of his mask, abruptly left him and mingled with the throng.

"I find," said Duval, to himself, "that the best way of concealing who I really am, is to proclaim myself by my real name, which no one will believe. I need not have troubled myself about this domino, and will get rid of it, for in my actual costume as Claude Duval, I shall only be considered to be supporting an excellent character at the masquerade."

There was no real difficulty in getting rid of his domino.

Various small apartments opened from the grand saloon in which refreshments were laid, but as the evening was yet young they had not been resorted to by any of the company.

It was a daring thing for Claude Duval, but he made his way into one of these little apartments, and loosening the string that held the domino round his neck, he let it slip from him, stepping out of it as it lay upon the floor, fully attired in that rich and fanciful costume which we have described sufficiently minutely before.

From his coat pockets Duval took a pair of pistols, and, releasing one button of his vest, he thrust them in so that their butts only were visible.

From another pocket he took a coiled-up riding whip, and then carefully adjusting his mask upon his face, he certainly presented in the most striking manner the character of a highwayman who might just have dismounted from his horse.

"Don't mention it," he whispered to the first mask he met after coming out of the room in which he had effected this little transaction,—"~~don't~~ mention it; but I am Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"Capital!" said the mask.

In less than five minutes it was rumoured throughout the whole saloon that one of the best personations at the ball was that of Claude Duval, the celebrated and gallant ladies' highwayman.

Duval found himself the observed of all observers; and as it was certainly not difficult for him to play his own part, he gathered great credit for his supposed ability.

A clapping of hands now announced the commencement of a dance.

A burst of music resounded through the saloon; and Duval, stepping up to a lady attired as Juno, gallantly requested her hand in the figure that was about to commence.

"Indeed," said the lady, "I have reason to refuse Claude Duval, since I have had a remarkable adventure with him."

Claude almost regretted, at the moment, that he had addressed this lady, for he felt confident that she was none other than the Marchioness of Queensberry herself.

But there was no retreat.

She clung to his arm, and Duval was forced to lead her into the throng of dancers.

A faint scream came from a lady in a domino, who, with her partner, a knight in steel armour, was immediately opposite to Duval and the Marchioness of Queensberry in the dance.

"The lady is unwell," said Duval.

"Oh, no," said the Marchioness; "it is her odious affectation!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; and if it were right to do so, I could tell you who she is, notwithstanding her mask."

"I have almost a right," said Duval, "to know who everybody is, since I honestly and openly declare who I am!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Nay, I speak but the truth, when I declare myself to be Claude Duval, the highwayman!"

"You support the character excellently; but I think you are the young Earl of Sefton."

"Indeed, no; but nevertheless you will much oblige me if you will tell me who the lady really is in the yellow domino opposite."

"If you must know," said the Marchioness, lowering her voice to a whisper, "it is that odious little piece of affectation, the Dutchess of Cleveland!"

"Ah, indeed!"

The dance at this moment commencing, prevented any further remarks, for our ancestors used to dance in earnest, and not merely lazily drag through a quadrille, as is the present fashion.

The figure was over.

But the Marchioness still clung to the arm of her highwayman partner.

"I, too, have had an adventure with the veritable Claude Duval!"

"Is that possible?"

"Yes. I was in my travelling chariot, at rather a late hour, in the Strand, when I was actually stopped by him; and he had the assurance to inform me, with a great many flourishes, that I need not repeat to you, how enamoured he was of me; and how, on that very evening, he had risked his liberty and life purely for the purpose of dancing a cotillion with me as his partner."

"Ah!" said Duval, "the fellow is deceitful."

"I hardly think so."

"Yes, he would say all that merely for the purpose of robbing you."

"Indeed, sir, you are mistaken."

"Nay ; when I play a part, I am never mistaken about any of its details. I seem to know everything that Claude Duval would do."

"No !"

"Yes ; what is more wonderful still, I seem to know everything that he has done !"

"Then, perhaps," said the Marchioness, who was a little amused and a little angry,—“then, perhaps, you will tell me exactly what did happen on the occasion I refer to in the Strand !”

"Let me see !" said Duval, affecting to be in deep thought—"let me see! Oh, yes, I see it now! There is a travelling carriage, in which sits the Marchioness of Queensberry——"

"Ah !"

"And a young lady with rather a pale face, and her hair in ringlets——"

The Marchioness started.

"The carriage is driven by a boy postilion, and it is stopped near to Somerset House!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Marchioness. "You, must either be Claude Duval or the——"

"Don't mention him, my lady ; and as for being Claude Duval, I have been assuring everybody that I am that very personage ever since I came into this saloon!"

"You amaze and confound me ; and yet I cannot believe that you are playing a part, and I believe you to be now the Chevalier de Evermont!"

"Madam, I assure you I am Claude Duval!"

"If I thought you were——"

"What then?"

"I should instantly give you into charge of the constables!"

"Oh, no, ~~my~~ I am ; having once honoured me with your hand in a card game, you could not do such an ill turn to your partner! But to convince you I am indeed Claude Duval, I will tell you that on that delightful occasion at the Strand, a certain pocket-book was taken from you!"

"It was—it was! But I can easily comprehend now, that, in order to play your part here well to-night, you have either bribed the postilion who drove my carriage to give you all these particulars, or you have them from my niece, Lucy Olive St. Clair !"

"You are very incredulous, Marchioness!"

"There you are wrong, too—I am not a Marchioness !"

"It is so rude to contradict a lady ; but if you are not the Marchioness of Queensberry, then I admit that I am not Claude Duval ! However, as you will not believe the latter assertion, I must prove it to you! Pocket-book come hither!"

"Eh ?"

"Pocket-book, come hither!"

In one of the pockets of his coat Duval had that very identical pocket-book in which he had found the ticket for admission to the masked ball.

The Marchioness of Queensberry leant upon his left arm, but Duval, insinuating his right hand into his pocket, grasped the book, and flinging it dexterously behind his back up into the air, it seemed to descend as if from the ceiling in front of himself and the Marchioness, when Duval caught it.

"There, my lady," he said. "You are convinced now?"

The Marchioness uttered a loud scream. She slipped from the arm of Duval to the floor, and he seized the opportunity of immediately mingling with the throng around them.

There was a rush of maskers of all sorts, ages, and conditions in that direction.

The Marchioness of Queensberry had fainted, and for about five minutes the greatest confusion reigned in the saloon. Duval stepped into the recess of a window. "Why am I here?" he said. "What good do I do in this place? I have frightened a woman, and, as yet, heard nothing of what I wish to learn!"

"And what may you wish to learn?" said a voice.

A gentlemanly-looking man, attired in a very old Court suit, was taking a pinch of snuff, and quietly looking at Duval from a few paces distant.

"I wish to learn," said Duval, "what has become of Lucy Everton, and what the impression is in high quarters concerning her future fate."

"The impression," said the gentleman, "certainly is that she will be hanged yet for the murder of her uncle, the General; and as for her rescue by Claude Duval, that only adds one to the catalogue of his offences, all of which he will have to expatiate upon the scaffold?"

"When he is caught," said Duval.

"He is caught."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, Do you know me?"

"I have not that honour."

"The character, then, that I support at this masquerade is that of Philip St. Ives."

"Philip St. Ives! And who may he be?"

"A gentleman, but who had thought proper to allow his Majesty's Government the benefit of his services as a detective of great criminals and great crimes."

"Well, sir?"

"You are detected. Claude Duval, I arrest you in the name of the King!"

"Excellent!" said Duval; "we shall produce quite a sensation. Of course, I have to yield!"

"I have to yield?"

"Oh, no, I keep up my character, and you yours. I want to go home, as I

"Nay, be tired of this affair. It will be a capital incident of the ball, and the high paragraph in the *Mercury* of to-morrow morning, of how well the character of a detective police-officer was sustained by one gentleman, and that of Claude Duval by another."

"But I am a Government detective!" cried St. Ives in a louder tone.

"Very well, sir," roared Duval, at least an octave higher; "and I am Claude Duval!"

St. Ives collared him.

"Captain!" said Duval. "Mind my cravat."

"Come on, sir—come on! Constables! constables! Where are the constables on duty? This is the notorious Claude Duval!"

"I am I own it," said Duval. "I am at length taken and defeated. I am Claude Duval, and this is Mr. St. Ives, the celebrated detective."

"Bravo! bravo!" shouted a hundred voices. "Bravo! by Jove! that's well done."

"And so natural," said the ladies.

The detective dragged Duval out from the recess into the middle of the saloon

CHAPTER XVII.

CLAUDE DUVAL THROWS HIMSELF UPON THE GENEROSITY OF THE DUCHESS OF CLEVELAND.

EVERY action that had been taking place among that large assemblage of persons was now suspended, in order that universal attention might be directed to what was supposed to be an admirably acted drama by two gentlemen, one of whom personated Claude Duval, the highwayman, and the other Mr. St. Ives, the celebrated detective of the police.

Rage impotence, and fury took possession of St. Ives. He seemed to see in this admirable manœuvre of Claude Duval's snatched from him all the credit that he would otherwise have obtained by that important capture.

In vain he tried to silence the bravos and plaudits that greeted him on every side. "I tell you all," he roared, "that this is really Claude Duval!"

"Yes," cried Claude, "and I tell you all that this is really Mr. St. Ives!"

"Bravo—bravo! Hurrah! Capital Well done nothing could be finer! Who are they? It is quite the feature of the masquerade! Bravo—! bravo!"

St. Ives would not quit his hold of Claude Duval ; and, as the latter forced his way towards the doors of a saloon, the detective was compelled to accompany him.

Fearful, however, of losing his prisoner, St. Ives kept calling out for assistance.

"I call upon you all in the King's name to assist me. Gentlemen, this notorious highwayman will escape, unless you lend me your aid."

Upon this, another round of applause absolutely shook the saloon, and St. Ives saw that it was quite hopeless to contend against the fixed impression present in every one's mind that he and Duval were two gentlemen playing a part.

The staircase was reached.

There was still a hope on the part of the detective that he might avert the arrest, for he knew that there were a couple of constables in the hall below.

"Help ! help!" he cried. "An arrest—an arrest!"

"Certainly," said Duval.

As he spoke, he closed with Mr. St. Ives, and thrusting him backward down the staircase, he flung him right into the arms of a man who rushed across the hall to receive him.

"Who is it?" shouted this man.

It was the voice of Muckles, the Bow Street officer.

"Claude Duval!" cried Duval himself.

"Ah! no—a mistake! You are——"

"That individual—I know it! How do you do, Mr. Muckles?"

Duval turned, and in two or three bounds reached the saloon again.

He trod upon the skirts of a lady's dress.

It was the wood-nymph, who had been declared by the Marchioness of Queensberry to be no other than the young and lovely Duchess of Cleveland,

Duval took the fact upon trust, for the lady was masked ; and having seen her but once before, he was not sufficiently acquainted with her general appearance to come to a conclusion with regard to her identity. A bold reliance, however, upon the generosity of the Duchess might yet save him.

She was remarkably short and *petite* in figure, so that Duval had to stoop low to whisper in her ear.

"Madam, I am really that unfortunate Claude Duval, who, hunted by his enemies, throws himself this night upon your generous mercy."

"Ah !" cried the Duchess ; "I know that voice."

"I am blessed in the recollection," said Duval. "It is the same voice that thanked you for condescending to dance with him one moonlight night."

"I have told the story," said the Duchess, "a hundred times, and with all the more pleasure that it has been a source of constant irritation to the Marchioness of Queensbury."

"How these women hate each other !" thought Duval. "Yes," he whispered again ; "I know it is so. But if you will take my arm, and say that you know me to be young Lord Adderly, you may save me."

"What—my cousin?"

"Yes, I am aware that Lord Adderly is your cousin, and such being the case, your word would be taken for my identity."

"But really——"

"Do not, I implore you, force me to apply to the Marchioness of Queensbury for that merciful consideration which I would fain owe to one so infinitely fairer and more lovely."

"I will do it."

"Then I am safe."

"You are a wicked, impudent man !"

"Alas ! I know it."

"There he is—there he is !" shouted St. Ives. "Come on, Muckles—follow me ! There's your man !"

"I see him," replied Muckles. "Come on, Swallow—follow me !"

"I'm here, Mr. Muckles."

The whole three made a rush forward ; but the Countess of Cleveland uttered two piercing shrieks, in a high tenor voice, and clung only the more closely to Claude Duval.

What is the meaning of all this ?

"I have the meaning, madam," said St. Ives, "is that whoever you may be, you are honest on the arm of a highwayman."

"Oh, no highwayman?"

"Nay, no, madam. That is Claude Duval."

The high Duchess of Cleveland burst into a shrill laugh.

It was evident that Mr. St. Ives had not the least idea of her quality.

"Mr. Muckles," he said, keep the door ; and now, madam, whoever you are, don't obstruct me in my duty."

"Your duty, sir?"

"Yes, madam, my duty."

"Do you know who I am?" asked the haughty and lovely lady, as she threw a withering glance at the officer.

[What farther transpired at the Masked Ball, and how Claude Duval contrived to escape from the toils gathering round him, will be fully set forth in the pages of "NIGHTSHADE ON THE HEATH ; OR, CLAUDE AND THE KING."]

THE END.

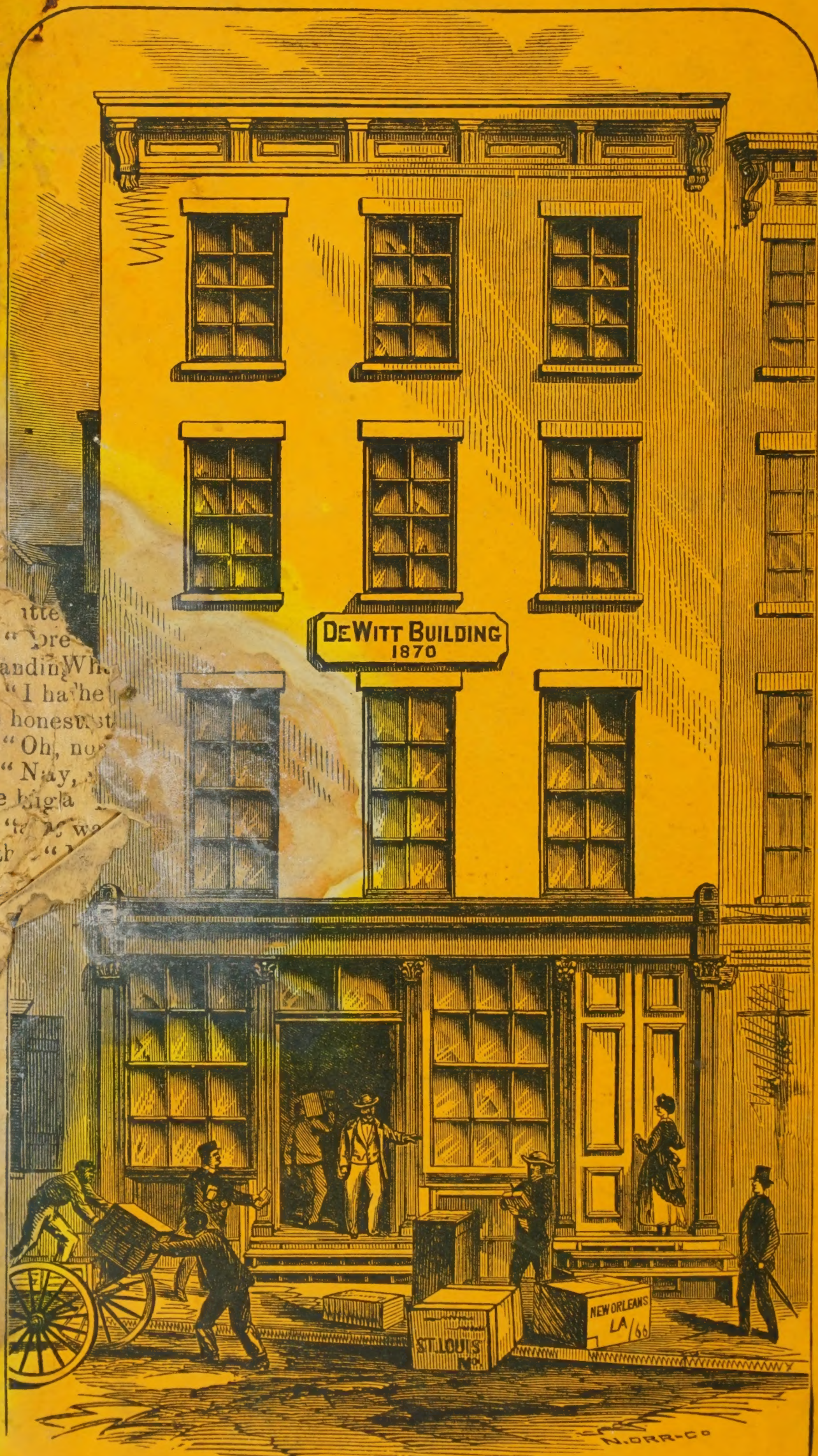
The publisher begs to call the attention of Readers to the CLAUDE DUVAL SERIES, which contains, perhaps, the most remarkable details of Highway Life ever presented to the public. "Gentleman Jack," the first of this series, has been speedily followed by "Jack and his Bride," and the other volumes, each complete in itself, and their popularity is unbounded. For Lists see cover.



ROBERT M. DE WITT'S

Books, Music, &c.

Mammoth Book and Music Publishing Establishment,



No. 33 Rose Street, N. Y.